

Spring 2018

Rupturing Perceptions

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Recommended Citation

Hardy, Isabella Montalvo, "Rupturing Perceptions" (2018). *Senior Projects Spring 2018*. 135.
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Rupturing Perceptions

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College
by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2018

Acknowledgements

To Nicole Caso and Susan Aberth for accepting the challenge of being my thesis advisors. Thank you for grounding my thoughts and providing me with your guidance.

To Tom Keenan for your kindness and support over the last two years.

To each of my respective grandmothers, Cuqui and Kay, for your endless love and for being my sources of inspiration.

To my friends for always reassuring me and providing me both comfort and distractions.

To my brother for his insight and always lending me a hand when I needed it most.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents who have been my rock and source of encouragement throughout my entire academic career. Thank you for your twenty-two years of parenting that I'm sure was a lot more arduous than writing this thesis.

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Introduction

During the 10th Havana Biennial (2009) a raised podium, guarded by two people dressed in military fatigues, sat in the center of the Centro Wilfredo Lam [Fig. 1]. Framed against thick gold curtains, the audience of internationals (who tend to sensationalize Cuba's revolution)¹ hoped to witness the infamous dictator, to some, or Leftist hero, to others, in action. Simultaneously, the audience of Cuban residents (accustomed to the their former president Fidel Castro's rallies) assumed that "the revolutionary political orator"² would arrive at any moment. Claire Bishop illustrates the nature of the scene saying, "the atmosphere was charged with an uncertainty and collective tension of a kind I have experienced before only at political demonstrations, when a critical mass of citizens are gathered in a potentially volatile situation."³ As a woman began to walk onto the stage, hundreds of cameras flashed from the audience. However, what ultimately unfolded amongst the flashing lights and invigorating tenor could only be described as "the unexpected" or "the uncanny." The woman embraced the microphones on the podium and begun to weep [Fig. 2], her sobs and wheezes echoing throughout the patio.

In turn, this event revealed itself to be a performative gesture conceived of by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera (b. 1968), entitled *Tatlin's Whisper #6* (Havana Version), 2009. In an act of her self-titled *Arte de Conducta*, loosely translated to behavior art, she engages the social realities of Cuba's politics to disrupt the general ideological coherence of the authoritarian state. She elaborates, "The political situation of the country, as it has been since January 1959 to today, has influenced all the areas of social and individual life, has entered with or without consent in

¹ Tania Bruguera, "Tania Bruguera: In the Studio," interview by Travis Jeppesen, *Art in America*, September 2015, 136, Academic Search Premier (109948739). Outside of Cuba leftists and intellectuals tend to be sympathetic to Fidel Castro and the achievements of the Cuban Revolution.

² Claire Bishop and Coco Fusco, "Public Address," *Artforum International*, Summer 2009, 40.

³ Bishop and Fusco, "Public Address," 40.

every daily aspect of life to become precisely a daily point of reference.”⁴ It is with this in mind that Bruguera’s philosophy toward art is best understood as an art of affect, a “rupture” within the public sphere.⁵ Quizzical and provocative in her work, she pushes the boundaries within Cuba and the contemporary art world. Through her performance art she intervenes onto the hegemonic sphere and invokes individuals to interpret their conditions for themselves.

Born and raised in Cuba’s post-revolutionary society, Bruguera was a part of the first generation of artists to be socialized, subjugated, and provoked under Fidel Castro regime of censorship and suppression. Vehemently opposed to the imposition of the Castro regime, she maintains that she herself is a revolutionary.⁶ As the daughter of a cultural diplomat of the revolutionary government,⁷ she has been privileged by her status and relationship to those in power, however this has not hindered her from engaging with the state systems of power and control nor has it protected her from state censorship. Named after “Tania the Guerrilla,”⁸ a revolutionary companion of Che Guevara, Bruguera has embraced the same radicalism in her approach to her art.

Due to the events following the revolution, there were sentiments of disappointment and anger of an unrealized utopia among Cubans, yet a demand for legitimate change still existed.

⁴ Tania Bruguera, "Interview with Tania Bruguera," by Pablo España, in *La Promesa de la Política* (León, Spain: Fundación RAC, 2010), 30.

⁵ Bruguera explains that for her, “political art has doubts, not certainties; it has intentions, not programs; it shares with those who find it, not imposes on them; it is defined while it is done; it is an experience, not an image; it is something entering the field of emotions and this is more complex than a unit of thought. Political art is the one that is made when it is unfashionable and when its in uncomfortable, legally uncomfortable, civically uncomfortable, humanely uncomfortable. (...) Political art is uncomfortable knowledge.” Ibid., 34.

⁶ “I am not against the entire project of the Revolution—I’m a revolutionary. I’m against the repression of free speech.” Bruguera, "Tania Bruguera: In the Studio," interview by Jeppesen, 135.

⁷ Nicole Bass, "Biography," in Helaine Posner et al., *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* (Milan, Italy: Charta/Neuberger Museum of Art, 2009), 128. Bruguera’s father, Miguel Brugas, was an underground militant during the Batista dictatorship and became a diplomat after 1959. He was a trusted ally of the revolution’s senior leadership.

⁸ Ibid., 128. “Tania the Guerrilla,” was the nickname of Tamara Bunke (1937-1967), a revolutionary companion of Che Guevara.

Cuban citizens were grappling with the suppression of living under a quasi-totalitarian regime that enacted violence, censorship, and submission to authority, incertitude after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, whom they relied on for economic and political support, and their confinement within the walls of the island. It was under these stifling conditions that art in Cuba became increasingly politicized under what Uruguayan artist, critic, educator, and theorist Luis Camnitzer has entitled the “New Cuban Art”⁹ movement of the late 1980s and 1990s.

I came to Bruguera’s work with an established interest in politicized art movements in Latin America. Her work specifically reflects the culmination of my interests in art, activism and the intersection of the two. Inadvertently, my family were also forced to grapple with the Cuban revolution. However, unlike Bruguera’s family, my grandparents (who were beneficiaries of the wealth inequality) were opposed to the revolution’s movement. My grandfather, who was involved in underground counter-revolutionary activities, was forced to flee Cuba after the revolution to circumvent prosecution, or even death. He traveled to the United States and then shortly after to Guatemala to train under the U.S. CIA and military for the invasion of the Bay of Pigs. As a result of the failed invasion, he was captured and held in *Castillo del Principe* (The Prince’s Castle) prison until December of 1962, when he, and the roughly 1,500 others he was tried with, were brokered for upward of sixty-two million dollars. My grandmother, eight months pregnant at the time, faced even graver risks having been born in America (while maintaining her

⁹ Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), xxviii. The “New Cuban Art” is what Camnitzer has referred to as the new political movements originating with “Volumen I” in 1981, and encompassing a group that began to exhibit in 1988 that “defines itself clearly as separate from its predecessors as a visual reflection of the present Cuban ‘rectification’ process, a process that challenges a purely mechanical approach to economics and tries to bring in ethical and political motivation with renewed force.”

dual-citizenship) and with a husband who was no longer present, and consequently fled not long after him to protect herself and their three kids.¹⁰

While my family's history sits on the opposite side of the spectrum to that of Bruguera's, I am inclined to look beyond the polarizations of pro- and anti- revolutionary, and toward engagement in real social change. Additionally, I am moved by art that goes beyond the self-indulgent, the acquisitive, and exclusive; I find Bruguera's approach essential in transgressing the traditions of the Western Modern and Contemporary art worlds. Chiefly the method I understand her to be initiating is a process of un-learning (and re-learning) essentialized identities, a process that is galvanized through the destabilizing nature of her performative work. While Bruguera's performances are often niche, applicable to the context of Cuban citizens under a quasi-totalitarian society, her methods can be, and have been, reworked to be deployed in other authoritative conditions. In coming to understand her work, it has become clear that Bruguera's methodologies critically surpass the general ideas of politicized art.

In the preceding chapters of this project, I will look to the work of Cuban-American performance artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), Mexican poet and diplomat Octavio Paz (1914-1998), and Cuban artist Juan Francisco Elso (1956-1988) in order to locate the origins of Bruguera's inclination toward body and performance art. I will later compare her works to Cuban-American interdisciplinary artist Coco Fusco (b. 1960), Chicano performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña (b. 1955), and Argentine conceptual artist Graciela Carnevale (b.1942) in order to corroborate the theoretical framing of my argument. These Latin American performance artists share a marginalized identity (either as a Latin American, a woman, a Lesbian/Gay/Queer identifying person, or a combination of the three) and an inclination toward

¹⁰ Once it was denounced that my grandparents had left, the government sealed and confiscated their house, and later converted it into the "Institute of Friendship".

confronting their own state's authoritarianism, its history of domination, and the construction of identities by outside forces.

The Latin American artists to whom I will compare Bruguera to in this project draw heavily from their own countries, or other Latin American countries, cultural and religious practices,¹¹ in order to cope with the Southern Hemisphere's irreconcilable histories of dominance and oppression and, concurrently, to create their own individualized methods of approaching body and performance art. Néstor García Canclini's description of a "multitemporal heterogeneity,"¹² the way in which Latin Americans maintain an incorporation of practices of the indigenous, colonial, and post-colonial, despite the modernization of their societies, is useful in grounding their hybridized strategies to circumvent and overcome dominant narratives inflicted upon the "other." The repercussions of their personal and cultural histories on the present are made apparent in their performative works. In looking toward the patterns evoked by Latin American performance artists of the last decade, Diana Taylor and Roselyn Costantino articulate the conditions addressed in their works:

The artists remind us that the glorification of the 'indigenous past' elides the very present predicament of impoverished native communities relegated both to the 'past' and to the economic margins. The colonial legacy of Hispanic and Roman Catholic institutions continues to exert its power, and specters of inquisitorial scrutinizing and prohibitions continue to haunt the present. Patriarchy permeates and structures all social formations at the macro- and micro-level. Meanwhile, the cultural imperialism of the United States threatens to relegate performance interventions into the off-off-off shadowlands of the third world produced by colonialism.¹³

¹¹ Coco Fusco, ed., *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas* (London, NY: Routledge, 2003), 7.

¹² Néstor García Canclini, "Cultural Reconversion," in *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, trans. Holly Staver, ed. George Yúdice, Jean Franco and Juan Flores (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 47.

¹³ Diana Taylor and Roselyn Costantino, *Holy Terrors: Latin American Women Perform*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 22.

These dominant ideologies that have continued to prevail are precisely the structures that Bruguera and her counterparts have set out to encroach upon through the dissemination of their art.

Coupled with the dominance present in the national and global paradigms described above, is the location of the state within the institutionalization of art worlds in Latin American countries. Because the state is one of the dominating benefactor of the arts within Cuba,¹⁴ they are able to fortify the official state rhetoric of a homogenous national culture, through its management over artistic production.¹⁵ This control over cultural institutions, which are otherwise supposed to invite autonomous thought and production, has led Latin American artists to merge avant-garde strategies with political strategy in order to confront and critique the state's power over this domain. Accordingly this had led such artists to adopt the use of ephemeral and temporal conceptual art qualities to evade state censorship and punishment.

These artists I have chosen to incorporate use performance methods to invoke sentiments and relations that are personal and intimate, yet, have the ability to transgress upon the social. Their ruptures complicate commonly held beliefs and interrogate the local and global structures of the systems that uphold them. It is in their confrontation with audience members that they are able to compel reflection and even impulsion toward civic participation. Using their body, identity, spectators, and political context as material they are able to recuperate and recirculate scripts that sit outside and in opposition to the prevailing dialogue, subsequently forming space for political potential in spite of the repressive conditions that seem to exist unabatingly.

¹⁴ Fusco, *Corpus Delecti*, 8. Specifically the state controls the networks of exhibition spaces, major collections, national and international competitions, fellowships, and awards.

¹⁵ Ibid.

This project provides an analysis of the ways in which Tania Bruguera, along with the artists I have chosen to relate her to, use performance-based art to intervene in the public sphere causing a “rupture” in the spectator’s identity formation and in the homogenous dominant ideologue. Using José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications* and Claire Bishop’s “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” I will demonstrate how this rupture is performed through a method of “disidentification” and/or “relational antagonism,” that critiques the state and the discrimination of minorities and posits the formation for new perspectives to be formulated.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Disidentifications:

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* José Esteban Muñoz discusses the formulation of identity through what he terms a “disidentification,” as “a hermeneutic, a process of production, and mode of performance.” Disidentification, as both a process of reception and production is enacted in order to “decode mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy.”¹⁶ Muñoz’s disidentification is indebted to earlier theories of revisionary identification. “Revisionary,” that is, ‘is meant to signal different strategies of viewing, reading, and locating ‘self’ within representational systems and disparate life-worlds that aim to displace or occlude a minority subject.”¹⁷

In order to understand how a disidentification may be enacted, Muñoz refers to Stuart Hall’s theory of encoding/decoding. Hall uses broadcast television as a metaphor to demonstrate

¹⁶ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

the way in which encoded meanings, seemingly intuitive to the members of society that are familiar with its references, are in actuality “both denotative and connotative of different ideological messages that reinforce the status quo of the majority culture.” In analyzing the way in which the viewer may decode these messages, Hall demonstrates that there are three ways in which the viewer may operate:

The first position for decoding is the dominant-hegemonic position where a ‘viewer connoted from, say, a television newscast, full and straight and decodes its message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, we might say the viewer is operating within the dominant code.’ The second vantage point from which to decode is the negotiated position that, to some degree, acknowledges the constructed nature of discourse but does not, within its interpretative project, challenge its authorization. As Hall puts it: ‘Negotiated codes operate through what we might call particular or situated logics: and these logics are sustained by their differential and unequal logics of power.’ The third and final position that Hall touches on is the oppositional one. This mode of reading resists, demystifies, and deconstructs the universalizing ruse of the dominant culture. Meanings are unpacked in an effort to dismantle dominant codes.¹⁸

Muñoz allocates the oppositional method of decoding dominant culture to orient his denotation “disidentification.” Through addressing and deconstructing dominant dialogues, disidentifications are henceforth able to expose their “universalizing and exclusionary machinations” and redistribute their workings “to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications.”¹⁹

Muñoz appropriates this concept from French linguist Michel Pêcheux who formulated the way in which a subject is constructed by ideological practices within Marxist theorist Louis Althusser’s theory of subject formation and interpellation.²⁰

For Althusser, ideology is an inescapable realm in which subjects are called into being or ‘hailed,’ a process he calls interpellation. Ideology is the imaginary relationship of

¹⁸ Muñoz, J.E., *Disidentifications*, 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-87. Quoted in Muñoz, J.E., *Disidentifications*, 11. Althusser ultimately derives his idea of “interpellation” from Jacques Lacan’s “misrecognition,” the process in which a subject assumes an identity they mistake for their own.

individuals to their real conditions of existence. The location of ideology is always with an *apparatus* and its practice or practices, such as the state apparatus.²¹

Pêcheux offers disidentification, as a way to move beyond the restrictive binary of identification or counteridentification. As the “third mode” of dealing with dominant ideology, it surpasses the choice between assimilation and being in definitive opposition to its constitutions by enacting a strategy that “works on and against dominant ideology.” For Muñoz, this “working on and against” strategy “tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance.”²²

Muñoz’s ultimately perceives identity “as produced at the point of contact between essential understandings of self (fixed dispositions) and socially-constructed narratives of self.”²³ Muñoz employs this analysis of disidentification strategies specifically as an interpretation of identity formation as a response to state and global power apparatuses that subjugate individuals based on their race, gender, sexuality and/or nationality. This strategy enables individuals to effectively address, cope, and dismantle “historical trauma and systematic violence.”²⁴

Disidentificatory Performances:

In defying authoritarian structures, disidentificatory performances work by revealing the “rhetorical/ideological” context of state power. Muñoz explains that this is done by returning again to Pêcheux, in his explanation of the workings of discourse analysis and state power, in which he sought to analyze the “discursive mechanisms” that uphold the dominant ideology.

Performance holds a unique strategy of being able to provide a “ground-level assault on a

²¹ Muñoz, J.E., *Disidentifications*, 11.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

hegemonic world vision” that otherwise is subdued in the dominant public sphere. This disidentificatory performance functions as a rejection of that which is taken up to be “real” (that is the majoritarian public sphere).²⁵ In this, the disidentifying performer is able to progress the subject through “political and symbolic space,”²⁶ and ultimately provide the ability for the performer and audience to conjure, what Muñoz refers to as “worldmaking.”

In understanding the role of performance within this theoretical framework Muñoz supplies, such performances are manifested through “strategies of iteration and *reiteration*.” By this he means that by dismantling the structures authoritarianism is disseminated through, individuals are able to offer and advance alternative structurings.²⁷ “*This reiteration builds worlds*. By using the the majoritarian culture as raw material, disidenificatory performances “proliferates ‘reals,’ or what I call worlds, and establishes the groundwork for *potential* oppositional counterpublics.”²⁸

Counterpublics:

“Counterpublics,” which are defined as “communities and relational chains of resistance that contest the dominant public spheres,”²⁹ pose interventions onto the majoritarian sphere (148). Muñoz elaborates that his definition of counterpublics is influenced by a mode of discourse theory that “(...) critiques universalities and favors particularities, yet it insists on a Marxian materialist impulse that *regrids* transgressive subjects and their actions as identifiable

²⁵ Muñoz, J.E., *Disidentifications*, 196.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁷ “Disidentificatory performances are performative acts of conjuring that deform and re-form the world.” *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Muñoz, J.E., *Disidentifications*, 146.

social movements.”³⁰ What is important in this statement is the way in which Muñoz identifies how a transgression, a violation of accepted or imposed boundaries (especially those of social acceptability), upon a subject can be productive. He states, “I am interested here in unveiling moment in which the majoritarian public sphere’s publicity— its public discourse and reproduction of that discourse— is challenged by performances of counterpublicity that defy its discriminatory ideology.”³¹ This thus leads him to advance the way in which counterpublic performances let us imagine new methods of social relations. Such performance practices, he explains, predominantly engage in cultural critique.³² Counterpublics, while they are not guaranteed, are “suggested, rehearsed, and articulated” through disidentifications.³³

Bruguera’s Disidentificatory Performances:

Bruguera, in manifold ways, defies the “repressive regimes of truth”³⁴ in order to create a truth that aligns to those being subjected to the authoritarian system’s mechanisms. In performing a disidentification, Bruguera deciphers the dominant heterogeneity by scrutinizing, emphasizing, or refashioning its process for the public. Her works, born out of the influence of Mendieta, borrow from her tendencies toward understanding and reconstructing her identity as a Latin American woman, by drawing from a personal narrative that simultaneously is able to resonate among others, while simultaneously grappling with her subjection to the repression of Castro’s repressive policies.

³⁰ Ibid., 149.

³¹ Ibid., 147.

³² Ibid., 33.

³³ Ibid., 179.

³⁴ Ibid., 199.

She maintains this procedure of disidentificatory performance by grounding her works in commentary and critique of dominant ideologies surrounding the female body, marginalized communities,³⁵ and the repressive politics of the state. However, in tracing the lineage of her performances, she begins to turn her work away from solo performances rooted in her own personal sentiments and toward engaging the social by hiring performers or using everyday people in substitute for her own body and by engaging spectators as participants. Hence, she removes the aspects that construct or deconstruct *her* identity and turns the audience's attention onto their own interaction *with* the performers. While Mendieta typically remained as integral to the piece, she as well conceived of sites that engaged with the public more directly, in an aim to provoke them. With this turn in Bruguera's work, I will look to Claire Bishop's "Relational Antagonism."

Relational Antagonism:

Bruguera's earlier pieces are clearly influenced by the methods employed by Mendieta and performance artists of the 1970s,³⁶ her later works tend to overlap more with performative strategies of the 1980s and 1990s which has largely been categorized under the popular framework of Nicolas Bourriaud's "Relational Aesthetics."³⁷ Bourriaud's categorization advocates that art of the 1990s takes as its theoretical horizon "the sphere of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an autonomous and *private* symbolic space."³⁸

³⁵ Bruguera will particularly address indigenous populations and Cuban exiles through her works. I will demonstrate this in the chapters to come.

³⁶ Namely Ana Mendieta and Marina Abramovic (b. 1946).

³⁷ First included in Bourriaud's 1997 collection of essays entitled *Esthétique Relationnel* (1997).

³⁸ Nicolas Bourriaud, "Relational Aesthetics//1998," in *Participation*, by Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel, 2006), 160.

However it is Claire Bishop's critique of Bourriaud that I find to be useful for analyzing Bruguera's later work.

In her article "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" she embeds Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's motifs of "antagonism" and "subjectivity" (from their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*) within Bourriaud's otherwise broad and unproductive theory to conceive of what she terms "relational antagonism." Opposed to Bourriaud's belief that "all relations that permit 'dialogue' are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good,"³⁹ Bishop advocates for a relational antagonism, that does not aim to seek a "harmonious reconciliation between the two systems," but rather "sustain the tension between them."⁴⁰ The work deems "relational antagonisms" are "'relational' in Bourriaud's sense of the word,"⁴¹ but it problematizes any idea of these relations being "fluid and unconstrained by exposing how all interactions are, like public space, riven with social and legal exclusions."⁴²

Subjectivity and Antagonism:

Antagonism is necessary as a tool to question and/or dispute society's organization as a fixed realm. For Laclau and Mouffe, antagonism within society allows for "new political frontiers" to be "drawn and brought into debate" (66). Bishop emphasizes this by stating, "Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of authoritarian order— a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy." However, she reminds us

³⁹ Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 65.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴¹ Bourriaud explains that exhibitions of contemporary art "create free spaces and periods of time whose rhythms are not the same as those that organize everyday life, and they encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the 'zone of communication' that are forced upon us." Bourriaud, "Relational Aesthetics//1998," 161.

⁴² Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 74.

that antagonism does not disclude imaginings of utopia, because, for Laclau and Mouffe, “without the concept of utopia there is no possibility of a radical imaginary.”⁴³

The origins of Laclau and Mouffe’s use of subjectivity, can be traced to French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Following Lacan,⁴⁴ Laclau explains that the subject is “neither entirely decentered nor entirely unified.”⁴⁵ That is to say, this model of subjectivity is, as Bishop explicates, “a divided subject of partial identifications open to constant flux.”⁴⁶ Within this model, the subject, as incomplete, or “failed,” is henceforth dependent on *identification* in order to proceed.⁴⁷ This is where antagonism emerges, as a situation that instigates feelings of unease or discomfort.⁴⁸ With this, “antagonism gives rise to a sovereign subject that confronts society as an enclosing containment established by the social imaginary, and that opens the gates to the excess of the social and of social praxis (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 96).”⁴⁹ What is important from this elucidation that Bishop lays out, is that antagonism urges individuals to re-examine their unmediated behavior.⁵⁰

From this, antagonism can be viewed as, “the limits of society’s ability to fully constitute itself. Whatever is at the boundary of the social (and of identity), seeking to *define* it also

⁴³ Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 66.

⁴⁴ For Lacan, the subject is equivalent to a conscious sense of agency: “Lacan’s ‘subject’ is the subject of the unconscious . . . inescapably divided, castrated, split” as a result of his/her entry into language.” Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 195-96.

⁴⁵ Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 66.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁸ Bishop explains, “In the case of antagonism, argue Laclau and Mouffe, ‘we are confronted with a different situation: the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally myself.’ (...) In other words, the presence of what is not me renders my identity precarious and vulnerable, and the threat that the other represents transforms my *own* sense of self into something questionable.” Ibid.

⁴⁹ Abril Trigo, “The Dialectics of Identity in the Latin/o American Global City,” afterword to *Cultures of the City: Mediating Identities in Urban Latin/o America*, by Amanda Holmes and Richard Young (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 205.

⁵⁰ Claire Bishop and Julia Austin, “Trauma, Antagonism and the Bodies of Others: A Dialogue on Delegated Performance,” *Performance Paradigm* 5, no. 1 (2009): 102.

destroys its ambition to constitute a full presence.”⁵¹ Laclau and Mouffe elaborate that it is within these social boundaries that antagonism occurs. For them, “it is from the exclusions engendered by this demarcation” that antagonism is able to demonstrate the way in which such limits are “both unstable and open to change.”⁵² This instability brings them to formulate that, “politics should found itself (...) on affirmation and the contingency and ambiguity of every ‘essence’ and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism.”⁵³ In other words, in exposing the realities of society, antagonism carries the potential to be productive in resisting and rethinking dominant ideology.

Bruguera’s Antagonistic Acts:

Bruguera’s site-specific works (beginning in 2000), which are composed of interventions onto her audience members, I argue, are acts of antagonism. In condemning the state and its subjects submission to its ideologies, she composes a situation that is tense, even unpleasant or agonizing. Her use of Laclau and Mouffe’s subjectivity is important in addressing the ways in which persons are socialized under, and unknowingly uphold, state ideology. While, this is nonetheless valid, it is important to address the coercion Cubans face under a repressive government, in which identifying with state ideology also may be a strategy to cope with their debilitating conditions. Nonetheless, Bruguera, in agitating her audience members is able to incite her audience to de-reify the state in making audiences aware its instability.

However, her audiences are not solely made up of Cuban citizens. Bruguera notably directs the state and Westerners in her audience, as well. In this, she demonstrates a

⁵¹ Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 67.

⁵² Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, 52-53. Quoted in Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 72.

⁵³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 193. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 74.

relentlessness to complying to the rules and regulations administered by the Cuban government. While, correspondingly, addressing Westerners blindness to the social realities of others and to their own countries inflicting politics. With this in mind, I will demonstrate the way in which Bruguera, and the performance artists I will compare her to, uses antagonism to disrupt individual identity towards disrupting state power.

What's to Come

With Muñoz's and Bishop's theories in mind, I will explore the ways in which Bruguera produces dissensus in her (early) disidentifying and in her (later) antagonizing performative works. Her turn from individualized performance toward one that engages with the social led me to address and analyze her works, respectively, as separate paradigms. However her shift does not mean that they do not share characteristics of one another. Throughout the chronology of her work, she has remained oriented toward addressing the state and its authoritarian presence. In using a modality of performance the artist integrates both personal and cultural narratives, in order to imbue a sense of discontent. Her depictions in effect make audiences vigilant of their own condition and the conditions of others, thus enabling and threatening their own belief systems. Such a destabilization thus provides for beliefs to be brought into question and for new insights to be gained.

The first section of my paper will analyze the ways in which Cuban-American performance artist Ana Mendieta was a progenitor to both Bruguera's performance- and site-based works. Being that Mendieta set the stage for feminized, ritualized, and politicized performance art, I will discuss the methods that are echoed within Bruguera's own works. This section also explains how the praxis of her works is able to conjure a "disidentification," in

discovering and developing her own sense of identity (and in relation to the context of her audience), and “relational antagonism,” in provoking unease and discomfort in order to disrupt widely-held belief. In the next section I will specifically analyze Bruguera’s, alongside Fusco and Gómez-Peña’s, works as disidentificatory performances, and finally in the last section of the paper I will look to define her more recent works, alongside a piece by Carnevale from the 1960s, as relational antagonisms.

Chapter 1

When the prominent Cuban American performance-based artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) crossed the Cuban border in 1980, she not only transgressed the previously held boundaries between Cuba and the United States,⁵⁴ but she also ruptured the imaginations of those otherwise isolated from the international art scene: Tania Bruguera and Cuban artists, alike. For most Cuban artists she became particularly influential as a communicator between the two worlds,⁵⁵ Bruguera however identified with Mendieta in a more profound way. Bruguera first learned of Mendieta's work in 1986, the year after her death, and would spend much of the next decade recreating a number of Mendieta's performative pieces in the context of Cuba.

At the forefront of the experimental arts of the 1970s, Mendieta employed sculpture, performance, and video and explored themes surrounding her identity by engaging with historical, cultural and religious traditions of the Caribbean in order to reconcile with her discontents of being displaced. She experimented with the most innovative forms of art and engaged in the current politicalizations of identity. Although celebrated most for the feminist connotations in her work, it would also be myopic to essentialize her as such. As Olga Viso illustrates,

Struggling to move beyond conventional art historical 'isms' and ghettoizing labels such as "feminist" or "Latina," Mendieta abnegated such definitions and distinctions while continuing to assert her transcultural identity as displaced Cuban, a woman artist living between Cuba, Europe, and the United States, between developing and industrialized world realities.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Olga Viso, "The Memory of History," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985*, by Guy Brett, et al., ed. Olga M. Viso (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004), 79. In 1977, the United States lifted their travel ban to Cuba and initiated a new post-diálogo agreement with the Cuban government.

⁵⁵ Camnitzer discusses on his first trip to Cuba in 1981, Mendieta directed him to the artists who belong to the beginning of what he once called the "Cuban Renaissance." Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, xxi.

⁵⁶ Olga Viso, "Introduction," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 32.

The intersectionality inherent in her work moved beyond second-wave feminism and engaged in a variety of spheres outside the dominant homogenous dialogue. Julia Bryan-Wilson explicates, “The feminism that mattered the most to Mendieta - Third World feminism - (...) a feminism that views anti-racism, anti-capitalism and anti-sexism as interwoven.”⁵⁷ Engaging in questioning the essentialized forms of identity, by looking toward the overlap between its conditions put her at the pinnacle of politicized, experimental, and performance-based art.

Born in Cuba, she was sent to the United States at the age of twelve in the Operation Pedro Pan (Operation Peter Pan)⁵⁸ movement. Although originally her parents were sympathetic to the revolution’s goals, they became uneasy of the growing repression and the conversations surrounding the nationalization of child-rearing, so they decided to send Ana, under the care of her fifteen-year-old sister, Raquelín, to the United States.⁵⁹ What the Mendieta family had hoped to be a temporary separation ended up lasting years. The sisters would not see their mother and younger brother again for half a decade, or their father, who had been captured at the Bay of Pigs, for another thirteen years.⁶⁰

Her early detachment from her familial and national origins and coming-of-age in an unfamiliar place sent her through a culture shock. It was in this state of turmoil that she felt both resentment and a longing to return home to Cuba, themes she would continue to explore through the exploration of her body (as object and material), ritual (as process), and the earth— a symbol

⁵⁷ Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Against the Body: Interpreting Ana Mendieta,” in Stephanie Rosenthal, Adrian Heathfield, and Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Traces: Ana Mendieta* (London: Hayward Pub., 2013), 34.

⁵⁸ Operation Pedro Pan (1960-1962) was a clandestine CIA mission, operating under the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Miami and the U.S. State Department, that airlifted more than 14,000 Cuban children from Havana to the U.S. Attebery explains, “A program for rescuing Cuban children from Communism became one of the major tactics the U.S. government pursued to undermine the Castro regime.” Clint Attebery, “From Havana to Montana: Cuban Refugee Children, Operation Pedro Pan, and the Cold War Catholic Church,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 63.

⁵⁹ Viso, “The Memory of History,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 38.

⁶⁰ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, et al., *Ana Mendieta: Blood and Fire* (Paris: Galerie Lelong, 2011), 69.

of the primordial– (as her frame of reference, in oscillating between Cuba, the U.S., and Mexico). She compares the trauma she felt in her depose from Cuba to being “cast out from the womb.”⁶¹ As a result, she turned toward her origins of Cuban cultural traditions to traverse the boundaries between gender, race, and nationality.

Between her first couple trips to Mexico (1971-1973), Mendieta had become fascinated with Octavio Paz’s book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Paz was fascinated with the prominent religious traditions of Mexico– Catholicism and Aztec culture– and their use of death through sacrifice as a means of releasing a surplus vital energy and the possibility of community.⁶² He writes, “Everything merges, loses shape and individuality and returns to primordial mass. Ritual death promotes a rebirth; . . . the orgy, sterile in itself, renews the fertility of the mother or of the earth.” He continues, “It is a return that is also a beginning, in accordance with the dialectic that is inherent in social processes . . .” This rebirth allows, for an emergence that is “purified and strengthened from this plunge into chaos. It has immersed itself in its own origins, in the womb from which it came.”⁶³ For Paz, disorder was able to revive that which had been dormant. Merewether illustrates that Paz viewed myth as a way of communion, which could provide a course toward unification. Art, or more specifically for Paz, poetry, rectified the “local or contingent and the universal.”⁶⁴

At this time, Mendieta became acutely attune to Paz’s intersecting ideas and would embrace them into the process of work. The profound importance Paz had on Mendieta can be

⁶¹ Mendieta quoted in Viso, “The Memory of History,” in Guy Brett et al., *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985*, ed. Olga M. Viso (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004), 47.

⁶² Charles Merewether, “From Inscription to Dissolution,” in *Corpus Delecti*, 138.

⁶³ Octavio Paz, *Las Peras del Olmo*, 24. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁴ Merewether, “From Inscription to Dissolution,” in *Corpus Delecti*, 139.

portrayed in her artist statements, in which she would deliberately incorporate parts of Paz's passages within her own writings. She states,

All detachment or separation provokes a wound. A rupture, whether it is with ourselves or what surrounds us or with the past or present produces a feeling of aloneness. In my case where I was separated from my parents and my country at the age of 12 . . . this feeling of aloneness identified itself as a form of orphanhood. And it manifested itself as consciousness of sin. The penalties and shame of separation cause me necessary sacrifices and solitude as a way of purifying myself. You live it, like proof and promise of communion.⁶⁵

For Mendieta, sacrifice as death and renewal became a mode for her to transgress her displacement from Cuba and disconcertment within the United States and to intersect cultures in order to construct her own identity. In turning toward her roots in latin American culture she latched onto the primordial ideas Paz suggested by Paz.⁶⁶

Additionally, the sacrificial object as woman reverberated within Mendieta. Paz's essay "The Sons of La Malinche" articulates La Malinche to be demure in her experiences with violence. "Her taint is constitutional and resides... in her sex. The passivity, open to the outside world, causes her to lose her identity: she is the Chingada. She loses her name, she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she is Nothingness. And yet she is the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition."⁶⁷ The "Chingada" symbolized the raped indigenous woman and mother to all Mexicans, and for Paz, La Malinche was passive in facing the brutalities of Spanish colonialism.

This is also relevant considering one of the Latin Catholic traditions of Marianism: The concept of woman as self-sacrificing martyr is idealized in Latin cultures as the complement to

⁶⁵ From Mendieta's unpublished notes written between 1973-1975. Ibid., 141.

⁶⁶ In a statement ("Art and Politics") made by the artist in 1982 she explains, "In essence my works are the reactivation of primal beliefs at work within the human psyche." Mendieta, quoted in Alexandra Gonzenbach, "Bleeding Borders: Abjection in the works of Ana Mendieta and Gina Pane," *Letras Femeninas* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 37.

⁶⁷ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 25.

male machismo.⁶⁸ In this a woman may only attain power through rituals of submission that offer access to ecstatic states through sacrifice. For Mendieta these ideas of the passive women “not only expose[ed] the subject of society’s repressive violence but it revealed that the relation between death and nature was the constitutive condition given to woman, in order to keep her always outside the social, displaced, in a state of exile.”⁶⁹ Her work addresses her identity as woman and outsider, yet reclaims her power through appropriating ritual into her art.

Paz for her reflected her own impulse to utilize biography as a way to understand her identity and provide a way in which intersection of the individual could be understood within its history and culture.⁷⁰ As a result, she looked toward her own Catholic background and the colonial history of Mexico and the Caribbean for inspiration.⁷¹ With the influence of ritual in mind, her engagement with body and performance art was her own communion to the historical traditions of the culture she was expelled from. Her body was employed as a conduit to enact ritual, thus enabling her to explore and expand upon her sense of identity and her ties to Cuba, and more so, in order to create a link to the primordial. With this in mind, I contend Mendieta to be looking toward the past and inward toward her own body, to evade the essentialist notions of race, gender and nationality and to conceive of her own identity, a disidentity.

Within Santería sexuality and sexual expression are synchronized with its practice, while, on the other hand, Judeo-Christian traditions engrained the necessitation to exercise denial of the

⁶⁸ Stacy Schultz, "Latina Identity: Reconciling Ritual, Culture, and Belonging," *Woman's Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2008): 15.

⁶⁹ Merewether, "From Inscription to Dissolution," in *Corpus Delecti*, 141.

⁷⁰ "Paz's declarations that 'Man is not *in* history; he *is* history' and 'To become aware of history is to become aware of our singularity' were popular motivations for the young artist [Mendieta]." Viso, "The Memory of History," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 49.

⁷¹ Within Cuba Afro-Cuban religions, primarily Santería, permeate Cuban society, however it's important to note that "since colonial times they have had a checkered relationship with the political authorities, variously suppressed, tolerated, and rehabilitated according to the complicated calculus of power in various historical epochs." Rachel Weiss, *To and from Utopia in the New Cuban Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 14.

human body in order to obtain salvation. Mendieta turns toward Afro-Caribbean practices, in which the female body could be used without being degraded because it was understood to be divinely sanctioned. Hence, the artist embraced these ideas in using her body in the nude throughout her works, transgressing the dominant Catholic influences of salvation and extricating herself from the taboo notions of female nudity.

In culmination, Mendieta uses her body as a medium to penetrate the boundaries that are imposed upon women and Latin Americans by looking toward her own personal history and the history of Latin American cultures. Correspondingly, her use of rituals of indigenous or African traditions was a way in which she could connect to her Cuban origins despite being displaced in the Midwest of the United States.⁷² Gerardo Mosquera explains that many contemporary artists of this generation⁷³ immersed themselves in their culture as a way to “intoject the ideology, values, and world views of these peoples into their art.” He continues that this introjection, in turn, would “project values, accents, and views from our tradition” into a “global human perspective.”⁷⁴ Gerardo’s quote is useful in illustrating the way in which Mendieta used art to transmit a rendering of a disidentificatory performance or an antagonistic site. It is within this in mind that she was able to navigate her own hardships while simultaneously grapple with her society’s perception and comprehension of itself.

Mendieta through her work illustrates her interest in divulging the dominant spheres of society, such as: human over nature, male over female, and product over culture. She emphasizes

⁷² In a statement made by Mendieta in 1983 she explains, “For the last twelve years I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body.”# The dialogue that takes place through her performance is, she explains, “the way I reestablish the bonds that unite me to the universe. It is a return to the maternal source.” Gonzenbach, “Bleeding Borders”, 37.

⁷³ “Mendieta’s strategy of invoking the past-the shapes, rites, rituals, and even anecdotes of indigenous or African traditions-as a way to comprehend them and come to terms with Cuban and Latin American identity, paralleled her colleagues’ ultimate endeavors.” Viso, “The Memory of History,” 81.

⁷⁴ Mosquera, “New Cuban Art: Identity and Popular Culture,” 59.

this in her piece “The Struggle for Culture Today is the Struggle for Life,” in which she addresses the forms in which power is exercised in a process of “deculturation,” where “its purpose being to uproot the culture of the people to be exploited” (“Ana Mendieta” 1996, p.173). She continues to argue that individuals are systematically socialized to conform to the ideology of the ruling class. But she claims,

Total deculturalization is impossible, because the history of social development is the struggle of the classes. The ruling class applies maximum power to its mechanism of deculturation to create a homogenous culture and the powerless class takes refuge in its own cultural traditions as a way to preserve their identity and survive.⁷⁵

Mendieta actively engages in this resistive reasoning within the content and process of her work and, ergo in her concomitant production of culture.

In the States she would enroll in the University of Iowa in 1967 and later in the school’s multidisciplinary master of fine arts Intermedia (later titled Multimedia) program, chaired by Hans Breder (1935-2017).⁷⁶ In his unprecedented program Breder incited “the need to break down barriers between art and life, the private and the public, custom and taboo,” and emphasized using the body “as the most direct experiential link between art and the audience.”⁷⁷ Swayed by Breder’s teachings, Mendieta ultimately would take a turn with her work in 1972 when she conversely left painting behind her. She would then begin working toward a path of work in which mixed media and performance in order to create something palpable.⁷⁸ She used her body as an “object of the real,” something felt and experienced by her and her audience members. Additionally its use in performance and in video carried an immediacy in which participants could identify or reflect on what was being perceived.

⁷⁵ Mendieta quoted in Donald B. Kuspit, *Ana Mendieta*, ed. Gloria Moure (Galicia, Spain: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 1996), 175.

⁷⁶ Herzberg, “Ana Mendieta’s Iowa Years,” *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 137-138.

⁷⁷ Viso, “The Memory of History,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 43.

⁷⁸ Roulet, “Ana Mendieta: A Life in Context,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 230.

In exploring social constructs of femininity, Mendieta created *Facial Hair Transplant*, University of Iowa, Iowa 1972 [Fig. 3]. I will use this piece as a paradigm case for her basic major gestures: utilizing the body, examining formations of identity, and subverting cultural norms. Documented in 35mm color slides, the process reveals her friend Morta Sklar shaving his beard piece by piece while Mendieta simultaneously glues them along her jawline creating a chinstrap beard. Mendieta describes, “What I did was to transfer his beard to my face. By transfer I mean take an object from one place and to put it in another. I like the idea of transferring hair from one person to another because I think it gives me that person’s strength.”⁷⁹ The final slide of her portrait in profile reveals a “natural” looking beard [Fig. 4]. Her long hair, a stereotypical representation of femininity, is entirely removed from the camera. While her facial features are still associated with the female body (i.e. her long eyelashes and full lips) there is an ambiguity to her gender now. Her expression is straight and serious, showing her depiction is not meant to be humorous but rather frank.

Through *Facial Hair Transplant*, she is able to show gender as a construct [Fig. 5]. In “Self Portraits” she explains that “After looking at myself in a mirror, the beard became real. It did not look like a disguise. It became part of myself and not at all unnatural to my appearance.”⁸⁰ Here Mendieta describes her performance as a creation of something real. The image in her reflection replaces the image that has been constructed of her as “feminine.” In manifesting her body she subverts the male gaze, instead of perpetuating traditional representations of women in art.

⁷⁹ Mendieta quoted in Kuspit, et al., *Ana Mendieta*, 150. Mendieta in another statement explains, “(...) her concept and hair’s associations with power and masculinity in her thesis statement (...)” Herzberg, “Ana Mendieta’s Iowa Years,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 255.

⁸⁰ Mendieta, quoted in Kuspit, et al., *Ana Mendieta*, 179.

Charles Merewether describes how other pieces from this period employ “devices of disguise or shrouding (masquerade), the body as an object of violation or distortion in order to displace a recognition of it as a woman, as a fixed identity that can read off its surface. Mendieta sought to critically reflect and represent the social formation of femininity. She was less concerned with formation of identity through experience than with the violence of experience which the social formation of identity entails.”⁸¹ This is made apparent in her use of deconstructing and reconstructing the features inherent to the body, in order to challenge the essentialized readings of identity prescribed onto the body.

One of Mendieta’s first pieces done in the Intermedia studio at the University of Iowa was *Untitled* (Death of a Chicken), 1972 [Fig. 6]. The piece is captured in both 35mm slides and a Super-8 film.⁸² In the film Mendieta holds the white feathered chicken, freshly decapitated by Breder, and lets its blood fall onto her nude body. The bird, clenched in her hands, wildly flails about for several minutes and her body thus becomes further splashed with its blood. When the chicken finally becomes still, Mendieta holds it directly in front of her stomach. Its wings are opened wide, symmetrical to Mendieta’s folded arms. In culmination she, as well as the walls and the floors that surround her, are soiled with the sacrificial animal’s blood.

Although she is not performing a particular ritual, the piece is ritualistic, borrowing from the syncretic Afro-Cuban religion of African Yoruba origins, Santería.⁸³ Mendieta, while not a devotee, was fascinated by the prominence of Santeía within Cuba’s cultural landscape.⁸⁴ She describes the origins of her fascination were rooted in her childhood,

⁸¹ Merewether, “From Inscription to Dissolution,” *Corpus Delecti*, 136.

⁸² Viso, “The Memory of History,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 63.

⁸³ Iles, “Subtle Bodies,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 208.

⁸⁴ Viso, “The Memory of History,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 63.

It is perhaps during my childhood in Cuba that I first became fascinated by primitive art and cultures. It seems as if these cultures are provided with an inner knowledge, a closeness to natural resources. And it is this knowledge which gives reality to the images they have created.⁸⁵

This interest, exploratory of connecting her with her Cuban culture, was further developed from her academics and the influence of her peers at the University of Iowa.⁸⁶

In looking at the ritualistic elements of the piece Charles Merewether suggests, “Mendieta’s subjection of herself to this scene suggests an identification of woman’s body with that of the animal.”⁸⁷ On the other hand, Olga Viso, in analyzing how the personification of an *orisha* (Afro-Cuban deities) becomes initiated by the use of ichor in such practices, interprets Mendieta’s body to be the “physical embodiment of a feminine, earthly deity.”⁸⁸ Denoting which is true, if either, is not so important. Both readings take in to account the use of her body, as female and the use of sacrifice to be associated with an identification formation.

However, Mendieta’s use of sacrifice surpasses a purely metaphorical interpretation. For her, blood was also expressive of power. In Santería religion blood is referred to as *ashé*: power or life force. It is considered to be a vital energy, a force present in everything, even a transforming power varying in degree. Thus the human body contains the potential to be a powerful site as a vessel of *ashé*.⁸⁹ Thus the body takes new form as a symbol for empowerment.

More so, the sacrificial practices, reminiscent of those practiced in Santería, is a reflection of her interest in Latin American multicultural practices. Mendieta explains Santería is

⁸⁵ Ibid, 296.

⁸⁶ Herzberg, “Ana Mendieta’s Iowa Years,” *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 150. The piece also is a directly influence by the use of violence and aberrant social actions reminiscent of Viennese Actionists (Austria 1960s), who she had been exposed to by Breder in the Intermedia program. RoseLee Goldberg explains, “Like the Viennese, she used blood as a cleansing material, but, unlike them, she viewed blood as a substance with healing and connective properties and as force for female creativity.” Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since 1960* (New York: Abrams, 1998), 96.

⁸⁷ Merewether, “From Inscription to Dissolution,” *Corpus Delecti*, 136.

⁸⁸ Viso, “The Memory of History,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 64.

⁸⁹ Schultz, “Latina Identity,” 13.

“a cult of the African divinities represented with the Catholic saints and magical powers.”⁹⁰ Its origins in Yoruba and Catholic beliefs and practices, each of which bear their own histories, became intertwined and transformed in the context of Caribbean. It is in this fusion and reinterpretation that Mendieta is drawn to. This is further supported by the fact that Mendieta was not solely influenced by the practices of Santería but other Cuban and Caribbean religious traditions, as well.⁹¹ In *Death of a Chicken* her audience is able to encounter a cultural practice outside of their own. In doing so she too is blending cultures, and, ergo, subverting the uniform belief systems. It is in this piece, the first that uses sacrifice as a method, that she exemplifies her interest in her own history and is thus enabled to connect to her culture while in exile.

While the Afro-Cuban religious references may be unfamiliar to Americans, Julia Herzberg addresses an important element, that animal death was not such an obscure sight. For chicken slaughter was a normal practice of everyday life in Iowa.⁹² It is this element of the everyday that Mendieta, as well, found appealing and useful as she used blood as a corporeal object, by that I mean she she did not find blood to be threatening but rather a part of life itself. She explains, “The turning point in art was in 1972, when I realized that my paintings were not real enough for what I want the image to convey and by real I mean I wanted my images to have power, to be magic.”⁹³ Following *Death of a Chicken*, blood would become a recurring material in her work.

⁹⁰ Mendieta, quoted in Olga M. Viso, *Unseen Mendieta: The Unpublished Works of Ana Mendieta* (Munich: Prestel, 2008), 296.

⁹¹ Viso, “The Memory of History,” *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 62.

⁹² Herzberg, “Ana Mendieta’s Iowa Years,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 152.

⁹³ Mendieta, quoted in Merewether, “From Inscription to Dissolution,” in *Corpus Delecti* 90.

In subsequence to the rape and murder of a student on the Iowa University campus,⁹⁴ Mendieta performed *Rape Scene*, 1973 [Fig. 7]. In performing a recapitulation of the crime, Mendieta became the subject. Exhibited in her own apartment, Mendieta positions her crotch at the corner of a kitchen table. Her underwear sits around her ankles and cattle blood is smeared on her bare butt and legs. Her wrists are tied to the opposite corner spreading her torso, head, and arms across the entire table [Fig. 8]. Her convoluted shirt is still on, displaying the exploitative nature of the scene and her head sits in splashed blood. Around her are shattered pieces of kitchenware and gore. For the event she invited friends and other University students over, and leaving her door ajar, participants walked into the horrifying scene. There is clearly a sense of vulnerability as she displays her naked body sprawled out and exposed, yet there is additionally a reclamation of her body as her own. Mendieta represents herself, as a woman, and victim of male violence, yet also uses her body to make a stake on the prevailing discourse.

In the audience into the work, Mendieta repositions the private in the public realm. In recapitulating the original crime, she incites the horror for her audience members and has them internalize the scene for themselves. In an act of self-sacrifice, the use of blood and her body become the subject matter. As the performance exhibits *real* materials, the audience is forced to absorb the human materiality present in the scene. The removing of the private/public barrier exposes the elements of force and violence inherent in rape, otherwise unseen or suppressed in public. In her reenactment she re-enforces the urgency for it to be comprehended by her audience. Alexandra Gonzenbach analyzes that, the use of the “abject substances,” that is the blood, is utilized “to expose it to the world in order to construct a discourse.”⁹⁵ In experiencing

⁹⁴ Herzberg, “The Iowa Years,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 152. This event is marked as Iowa’s first homicide, the murder of a nursing student by the name of Sara Ann Otten.

⁹⁵ Gonzenbach, “Bleeding Borders”, 37.

the site, the corporeal incites participants to become aware and provoked by the scene of the event and by society's corroboration of violence against women. Furthermore, she disrupts the narrative of the demure woman, by accentuating the event in her reiteration of the crime. This piece, in a turn from *Facial Hair Transplant* and *Death of a Chicken*, is less biographical. While she remains in the piece, her identity is not central. Instead the spectator turns their attention toward the violence within the site, thus situating this piece closer to relational antagonism.

Continuing to engage with the use of animal blood as a material, Mendieta created two Super-8 color films at the University of Iowa in 1974, *Untitled* (Blood Sign #1) [Fig. 9] and *Untitled* (Blood Sign #2/Body Tracks) [Fig. 10]. In both of them she dips her hands and forearms into blood, and uses her smothered arms to daub the blood against a wall. In *Blood Sign #1* Mendieta uses the blood to gesture on the wall. She reaches her right arm up and across as far as she can reach to surround her body with the shape of an arch. She likewise uses her left arm to continue the arch until it meets the ground on the other side. When she retreats from the wall she writes with the blood "There is a devil inside me."⁹⁶

The statement, intensified by the lack of sound in the video, while overtly religious, is not confessional. Chrissie Iles argues, "The naming of the devil in blood transgresses the Catholic association of blood with Christ as a source for life."⁹⁷ In this interpretation, Mendieta propounds the traditional notions of blood as the "work of the Devil," and as Iles expounds, "Mendieta's statement of possession implies an understanding that her nascent identification with pagan symbols of female fertility (...) transgressed the patriarchal system of Cuba, and the West in general, in which it is the blood of Christ, not the Great Goddess, that gives eternal life."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Iles, "Subtle Bodies," in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 209.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Mendieta, again, uses her body to represent and to reclaim ownership over the female body as a source of power. In this, she distorts the prejudiced notions of blood being inherently grotesque and instead connotes to its faculty. Its absorption within her body alludes to the dominant ideologies subsumed within society's belief systems.

In *Blood Sign #2/Body Tracks* Mendieta similarly applies her hands dripping in blood to a bare white wall. The video depicts her submerge her hands and forearms in the animal blood and then turn her back to the camera to face the wall. She raises her arms in a 'V' formation above her head, and moves from a stance to a kneel to eventually she is laying on the floor. Her arms glide down the wall leaving a trace of smeared red, bloody tracks [Fig. 11]. She then walks off screen and out of the camera. Playing in the background of the film are the sounds of Afro-Cuban drums,⁹⁹ alluding to the syncretic religious traditions of Cuba and her desire to connect with her roots.

Her piece illustrates both the presence and absence of her body. But even in its absence, her body remains an active part of the piece, because the blood remnants left behind manifest the presence of a body that *was* there. In this, the cryptic marks exhibit an act of violence, particularly connoting violence against women. Yet again, for Mendieta, blood was not just employed as a method of agitation. She uses her body to connote to the process of the piece and employs blood as the material object. For her, its symbolism of life in Santería and her reference to blood as a natural, bodily object is a powerful gesture on its own.

Reflective in each of the pieces laid out above is a methodology of disidentificatory performance and/or relational antagonism, in which Mendieta is active in deconstructing and reconstructing narratives of Latin Americans and women. As the active subject of a social

⁹⁹ Gonzenbach, "Bleeding Borders," 37.

exchange, she creates an experience for her audience to be active in, too. Mendieta describes this process as a form of “educating by *uneducating*.”¹⁰⁰ Her works, which began as a search for a fuller understanding of her identity formed as an agent of dissensus, in which the audience is amenable to the set of beliefs that is divulged throughout each piece. This is maybe most overtly exercised in *Facial Hair Transplant*, in which Mendieta exhibits the process in which she constructs gender, and in *Rape Scene* in which she exposed the experience of rape by bringing her audience into the site of the piece. Engaging them as witnesses Mendieta urges her audience to reflect on the conditions of violence against women that prevail within society. *Death of a Chicken* and *Blood Signs #1* and *#2*, on the other hand, merge cultural and religious vocabularies thus connecting Mendieta to her roots while transgressing social and political boundaries. It is in these pieces Mendieta used performance, as both a response and a way to combat the dominant forces of society.

The first time she returned to Cuba was in 1980, as one of the first Cuban exiles to return to the island.¹⁰¹ However, her return was not only relevant to her personal desire to return home, for at the time Cuban artists, while they may have been familiar with some of the work being produced in the U.S., had little to no interaction with artists from the U.S. Mendieta thus became iconic as a bridge to the two worlds.¹⁰² Luis Camnitzer’s writes: “Ana became the ideal mediator between the 1980s generation and the ‘outside.’ She (...) provided a sounding board for ideas and gave moral support. She also became a two-way carrier of information about art between Cuba

¹⁰⁰ Solomon-Godeau, et al., *Ana Mendieta: Blood and Fire*, 29.

¹⁰¹ Prior to 1980 Cubans who were in exile were not authorized to return.

¹⁰² “To know Ana was a bombshell for us,” Juan Francisco Elso explains. “It was discovering how the world could see us and how we could become conscious of what we were making. . . . it was really my first contact with someone who sees your production with a different eye, not ruminating within your own relations. . . . In some of us, a more universal, more ambitious capacity in the process of creation was established.” Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 10.

and the United States.”¹⁰³ In total she made seven trips before her death in 1985. The second of which corresponded with the opening of “Volumen Uno” (Volume One), a noteworthy/unprecedented exhibition that generated the rise of *la generación de los ochenta* (the 1980s generation).¹⁰⁴

Her both startling and anomalous death at the age of thirty-six (caused by her fall from a thirty-floor foot window of an apartment she was living in with her husband Carl Andre) and subsequent trial and acquittal of Andre has resulted in the idolization of Mendieta as a prototypical feminist artist. Coco Fusco has criticized the art world for canonizing Mendieta in the aftermath of her death. For Fusco argues her glorification has led to essentialized interpretations of her and her work. Additionally, Fusco addresses Mendieta was a struggling artist, marginalized within the art world and is disappointed by those who have popularized her solely due to the tragedy of her death.¹⁰⁵

While Bruguera never met her, she was deeply moved by her. When Mendieta crossed the border from the US to Cuba, it was not merely a physical act, it was symbolically potent, as well. Viso explains, “[Mendieta’s] belief that culture can transcend social and political boundaries set a vital precedent for Cuban artists.”¹⁰⁶ Her impact influenced Bruguera to reinstate Mendieta’s presence, symbolically and spiritually, through her series *Homenaje a Ana Mendieta* (Tribute to Ana Mendieta), 1985-1996, for it was important to reemphasize the significance of Mendieta to younger generations of Cubans after she had passed.

¹⁰³ Camnitzer quoted in Laura Roulet, “Ana Mendieta as Cultural Connector with Cuba,” *American Art* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2012), 24.

¹⁰⁴ Viso, “The Memory of History,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 79.

¹⁰⁵ Bryan-Wilson, et al. “Against the Body: Interpreting Ana Mendieta,” *Traces*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Viso, “The Memory of History,” in *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body*, 131. Viso as well notes that at the time her essay was published in 2004, Mendieta remained “the only Cuban expatriate artist living and working in the U.S. to have been granted travel opportunities, access, and recognition by the Cuban government in official artistic contexts.”

The way in which Mendieta engaged with the “mystical, historical and cultural aspects” through her *Earth Body* works initially brought Bruguera to apply disidentificatory performances in her earlier works. However, it would be the situational pieces like *Rape Scene*, which provoked a viewer’s response through experiencing the reality of lived events, that would be absorbed in Bruguera’s methodologies in her later developments.

Mendieta’s disidentificatory performances were markedly constructed from her own expatriation from Cuba and in discovering the writings of Octavio Paz. That is to say, Mendieta— deeply perturbed by her uprooting from her home (and the subsequent discrimination she faced in the United States) as well as both moved by Paz’s articulations of ritual and roused by his interpretation of women— used her personal and cultural past to invoke an identity of a woman and of a Latin American that sat outside the dominant dialogue.

As Bruguera’s progenitor, Mendieta laid out the praxis of disidentificatory performances by using her body in the nude in her public performances and in exposing the violence women are subjected to confront and subvert the norms that construct the need for women’s bodies to be concealed and identify women as being passive. Coupled with that, she uses ritual practices in order to transgress her identity as an “exile” and draws from historical and religious patterns of Latin American¹⁰⁷ to bolster her identification as a Cuban and to breach the homogeneities in the United States. Bruguera will explicitly replicate these identificatory practices and then integrate such methods, creating her own performative style.

¹⁰⁷ Additionally, Weiss notes that, “Afro-Cuban religious culture and ritual, Native American spirituality, and Mesoamerican cultural traditions were all part of a lost identity that became of great interest to artists of the *Volumen Uno* generation.” Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 13.

Chapter 2

Principle to Bruguera's development in performance-based works was her graduate thesis at the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, a series of re-performances entitled *Homenaje a Ana Mendieta* (Tribute to Ana Mendieta), 1985-1996 [Fig. 12]. The project was born out of Bruguera's sentiment that Mendieta remained not well known enough amongst younger generations of Cuba. She defines it as a "cultural act:"

The object was the point of reference. I was merely the archaeologist, the medium. Ritual, which was part of her work, was the way which I approached her. The idea was to incorporate her, to rescue her from oblivion, to make her part of a cultural context. It was to give her a space and time in Cuba. ... Ana was interested in rescuing the idea of Cuba from the outside, I was interested in rescuing the idea of the Cuba that was abroad.¹⁰⁸

Bruguera, at the age of eighteen, began in her *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* series in 1986, with her recreation of Mendieta's *Blood Trace*. Bruguera dipped her hands in a mixture of animal blood and tempura, pressed, and dragged them down sheets of paper as Mendieta had done for *Body Tracks* and later she would rejuvenate Mendieta's prototypical *Siluetas*. In reiterating Mendieta's works, Bruguera revived Mendieta back into the place from which she had been exiled from, and thus onto Cuba's social history. Goldberg notes the prominence of her re-performances of another artist's work as an "entirely new approach to performance history."¹⁰⁹

Bruguera's teacher (at the Elementary School of Art in Havana) Juan Francisco Elso, who was also a colleague of Mendieta's,¹¹⁰ was a potent influence for her. Elso "looked to

¹⁰⁸ Bruguera, quoted in Kevin Power, "Tania Bruguera: Art as a Gesture," in *The Real Royal Trip: El Real Viaje Real* (Long Island City, N.Y.: P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, 2003), n.p.

¹⁰⁹ Tania Bruguera, "Regarding Ana: Interview I," by RoseLee Goldberg, in *Tania Bruguera*, by Tania Bruguera and RoseLee Goldberg (Venice, Italy: Biennale Di Venezia, 2005), 8. Mosquera describes these re-performances as "artistic transubstantiations born out of the ritualistic, mystical approach to art typical of Elso and other Cuban artists in the early 1980s." Gerardo Mosquera, "Cuba in Tania Bruguera's Work: The Body is the Social Body," in *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* (Milan, Italy: Charta/Neuberger Museum of Art, 2009), 32.

¹¹⁰ Viso illustrates the intertextuality and exchange between Mendieta, Elso, and other Cuban artists in stating, "Mendieta's fascination with Cuba's indigenous past and living Afro-Cuban traditions were of mutual interest to her colleagues Bedia, Brey, and Francisco Elso, who were just beginning their own

activate a creative personal experience among his disciples.”¹¹¹ Additionally, his and Mendieta’s practices of mystical and anthropological tendencies,¹¹² namely using the practices of Afro-Cuban religions, were borrowed by Bruguera in her development of performance art. Gerardo Mosquera describes Bruguera’s re-performances as “artistic-religious possession.”¹¹³ Possession refers to the process of a deity or a spirit entering and taking control of the worshipper’s body (usually during a ritual dance) to come to the earth and express themselves.¹¹⁴ Bruguera’s use of possession could thus be described as the manner in which her body serves as the medium to embody the spirit of Mendieta and culminate her identity as a Cuban. As a result, Bruguera, reflected her predecessors’ interest in re-rooting Afro-Cuban culture in the contemporary moment.

RoseLee Goldberg explains the sensorial nature of the type of performance that Bruguera adopted from her predecessors Elso and paramountly Mendieta, in which she would “retreated into the human psyche, tending to perform solo, concentrating on single gestures that were often painful to endure, and unnerving to watch.”¹¹⁵ Goldberg explicates that Mendieta, amongst other performance artists in the 1970s, used their own emotional histories to attack taboos.¹¹⁶ It would be these methodological and theoretical elements that Bruguera would embrace in the early stages of her performance works.

When Bruguera discovered Mendieta’s works, her decision to re-perform her original performances was in part “to recover Mendieta’s legacy from official policies aimed at erasing

personal investigations into Afro-Cuban religions and the incorporation of Afro-Cuban aesthetics into their art. Additionally, they shared an appreciation of Mesoamerican art and the writings of (...) Octavio Paz.” Viso, “The Memory of History,” 81.

¹¹¹ Mosquera, “Cuba in Tania Bruguera’s Work,” in *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*, 31.

¹¹² Weiss, quoted in *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Goldberg, *Live Art Since 1960*, 23.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the cultural contributions of Cuban expatriates.”¹¹⁷ Cuba, at the time, was enduring what Fidel Castro proclaimed to be the “Special Period in Time of Peace” (1990-2004),¹¹⁸ in reference to the economic crisis that engulfed Cuba after the Soviet Union collapsed. Weiss illustrates,

“economically, ideologically, logistically, psychologically, Cuba imploded. Dire shortages cascaded from the national to the personal scale: food, electricity, gasoline, transportation, basic household goods, clothing, medicines even soap-even water-all became either unavailable or unaffordable. The ration system provided only a fraction of the goods previously guaranteed, and only a fraction of the previous quantity.”¹¹⁹

Due to the economic affliction, a massive exodus of Cubans was leaving the island by illegal means for the United States. Bruguera’s *Tribute* thus can be understood as a symbolic gesture to not only emphasize the feelings of displacement felt by Mendieta, but how those same feelings reminisced with the political moment in 1990, as hundreds of artists left to emigrate the island’s unlivable conditions at the time.¹²⁰

With Mendieta, a new generation of artists began to arise in the 1980s in Cuba who, “transformed the official modernist, ideology-centered, nationalistic, conservative status quo of the previous decade, freeing the scene and renewing the country’s culture. (...) It was a period of very intense, transformative artistic energy, and also of conceptual discussion, social criticism, and openness to international trends. An art of ideals prevailed, with neo-conceptual and postmodern slants.”¹²¹

With this new generation of artists Bruguera notes being particularly influenced by the Cuban conceptual artists known as *La Generación de los Ochenta* (The Generation of the Eighties)¹²²,

¹¹⁷ Bruguera, *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* Statement, <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/495-0-Tribute+to+Ana+Mendieta.htm>.

¹¹⁸ “The Special Period in Time of Peace was “(...) declared late in 1990 by Fidel Castro in recognition of the economic and psychological liquification of the country. Cuba would survive by operating under wartime provisions and would undertake a strategy for economic recovery (including opening to foreign investments, the unbridled development of the tourist industry, and allowing the creation of small businesses in the service sector) that departed from, if not outright contradicted, the socialist ideology maintained at the core of political power and control.” Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 152.

¹¹⁹ Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 153.

¹²⁰ Bruguera, quoted in W.J.T. Mitchell, “How to Make Art with a Jackhammer: A Conversation with Tania Bruguera,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 42: 52. Bruguera notes that the tightening of cultural policy in the late 1980s and early 90s, as well, prompted artists to leave.

¹²¹ Mosquera, “Cuba in Tania Bruguera’s Work,” 30.

¹²² Tania Bruguera, “Being Cuban: Interview II,” by RoseLee Goldberg, in *Tania Bruguera*, by Tania Bruguera and RoseLee Goldberg (Venice, Italy: Biennale Di Venezia, 2005), 18. Bruguera has referred to

who were known for “radical[izing] Cuban art praxis.”¹²³ Bruguera embraced their sentiment to challenge state censorship by using her art as a tool for political dissemination. Following this trend, Weiss describes how “art of social insertion” flourished in Havana through the 1990s.¹²⁴

In re-performing Mendieta’s original pieces Bruguera was able to situate herself within the practice of performance-based work in a formative way. For Bruguera, Mendieta showed the way in which performance was able to provoke a “hyperrealism,” where the goal is not to represent reality but to be inserted in it, as well as, be communicative of a “narrative,” of the artist’s culture and the heritage of that culture, where the viewer’s experience is an important element in framing the piece.¹²⁵ The provocation of “the real” and the transmission of experience between performer and participant laid the basis for Bruguera’s approach to her art.

Performance, an ephemeral process in which thought and action can be intertwined, was thus the *modus operandi* to approach art and politics in tandem. In this essay I will discuss how Bruguera, inspired by the works of Mendieta and the teachings of Elso, used Mendieta’s praxis accordingly to form a disidentification to reject the majoritarian ideology. I will begin by using her piece *El peso de la culpa* (*The Burden of Guilt*), performed in 1999, and then later compare the work to Coco Fusco and Guillermo-Gomez-Pena’s *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit... [the West]*, performed throughout 1992-1994.

them as being the most important influence on her work. The group included: Flavio Garcíandia, Glexis Nocoa, Carlos Cárdenas, Lázaro Saavedra, José Angel Toirac, Arte Calle, among many others.

¹²³ “Influenced by North American conceptual art and the advent of perestroika, the eighties generation viewed their art as a weapon and agent of freedom. Their recuperation of themes and subjects long proscribed by government censorship was the art community’s first collective effort to challenge official positions on the country’s cultural life. Bruguera was a student of these changes: the proliferation of happenings, the popularization of semiotics, and Cuban art’s new activist agenda.” (Bass, “Biography,” in *Tania Bruguera On the Political Imaginary*, 128-129).

¹²⁴ Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 207.

¹²⁵ Bruguera, “Regarding Ana,” interview by Goldberg, 10.

Bruguera's piece *The Burden of Guilt*, 1999 [Fig. 13] was performed concurrently to the sixth Havana Biennial in 1997, however it was not a part of the event itself.¹²⁶ Despite not being invited to the international event,¹²⁷ Bruguera performed the piece from her home, located in a (turbulent spot) of Old Havana. In the piece, she sits with a lamb carcass hanging from her neck in front of a twelve foot high Cuban flag woven of human hair entitled *Statistics*, 1996-1998 [Fig. 14]. In front of her were two ceramic bowls, one of saltwater and one of soil.

The intensity of the performance is seen in the ritual and repetition,¹²⁸ as Bruguera rolled the materials into small balls and slowly ingested each ball one by one. She continued doing this for almost up to an hour, as her spectators stood watching her endure the painful process. The performance is one of prescribed guilt. The sacrificial act originates from a legend of indigenous Cuban people who suicidally ate soil "as a passive way to resist the Spanish conquistadors."¹²⁹ To this day "comer tierra" (to eat dirt) is used as a common Spanish expression to refer to enduring difficult times.¹³⁰

The provocative process enacted in this piece manifests a sensorial response that is sharp and distressing. The use of her body as a corporeal material bears the weight of pain and suffering. Furthermore the active nature of the piece, in which her audience observes her

¹²⁶ Bruguera planned this alternative performance in occurrence with Coco Fusco's own piece *El Ultimo Deseo* (The Last Wish), 1997.

¹²⁷ José Muñoz, "Performing Greater Cuba," in *Holy Terrors*, 402. In 1994 Bruguera had published *Memoria de la Postguerra* (Memory of the Postwar), a journal that had the format of a newspaper and was titled) that included Cubans inside and outside of the island expressing their feelings on the Cuban state at the moment. As a result the government censored the piece and did not invite her to perform at the 1997 Biennial.

¹²⁸ Her physical and psychological feats of endurance recall the work of Mendieta and Abramovic. Posner, "Introduction," in *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*, 15.

¹²⁹ Weiss substantiates upon this myth: "According to Louis A Pérez, citing sixteenth-century accounts, 'perhaps as many as 30,000 Indians-almost one-third of the total pre-Columbian population of Cuba-perished as a result of suicide during the early days of European conquest and colonization. They chose death by way of hanging. They ingested poison. They ate dirt in order to die' (*To Die in Cuba*, 3-4)." Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 302n.122.

¹³⁰ Posner, "Introduction," *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*, 23.

enactment of the suicidal process, elicits them to empathize with her affliction and understand the context that led her to engage in it. While the act is one of pain, the art is not made to heal, instead it revitalizes and re-embodies the history of torment that indigenous populations experienced under Spanish colonization and what ultimately informs present-day Cuba. Her performance of sacrifice related the lived experiences of pain and suffering felt during the Spanish conquest to that of the current moment under the oppression of Castro. This parallelization thus posits her viewers to reevaluate a moment from history with their existing conditions.

The piece is rich with symbolism evoking similar representations to those of Mendieta's works. The flag woven of the hair of Cubans,¹³¹ a symbol of nationality (the flag itself) and of the people who embody it (the hair). The lamb carcass, used as a shield over her body, borrows from the Afro-Cuban religions of her country, particularly Santería, in which the lamb is used as an animal of ritualistic sacrifice.¹³² Her use of the lamb, however, is not purely symbolic, Like Mendieta, Bruguera explicates that the animal is charged with energy.¹³³ For Bruguera, energy is inseparable from the work, as a galvanizing feature of art itself. She further intended to engage the carcass as a Eurocentric symbol of submission,¹³⁴ thus echoing the indigenous persons' resignation. The saltwater denotes grief while the soil is that of the earth of Cuba (her home and her heritage) and, more so, the same soil used by the native Cubans in the myth. Her enactment of bringing the soil into her body, alludes to her desire to emphasize the importance of the Cubans emigrating the island at the time.¹³⁵

¹³¹ The human hair was provided by both friends on the island and others in exile.

¹³² Muñoz, "Performing Greater Cuba," in *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*, 404.

¹³³ Ibid., 405.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 405.

¹³⁵ Bruguera emphasizes her interest in maintaining an awareness of the important Cuban artists who were emigrated the island in recent years. "[A]t the time the most famous Cuban artists, like José Bedia

Bruguera's use of this ritual reflects the debilitating conditions Cubans were facing after the fall of the Soviet Union and the political impasse within the "Special Period." Bruguera explains,

The only way that some of them [indigenous Cuban people] could rebel – as they didn't have any weapons and they weren't warriors by nature – was to eat dirt until they died. This gesture, which remained with us more as a historical rumour, struck me as hugely poetic in a way, it speaks to our individuality as a nation and as individuals. Eating dirt, which is sacred and a symbol of permanence, is like swallowing one's own traditions, one's own heritage, it's like erasing oneself, electing suicide as a way of defending oneself. What I did was take this historical anecdote and update it to the present.¹³⁶

Bruguera's adaptation to the present is particularly applicable as their form of rebellion came in response to their lack of mechanisms to otherwise defend themselves. Her performance conveys the lack of agency Cuban dissidents have under Castro's oppressive policies, which restricts their individual freedoms.

Bruguera, in borrowing from techniques used by performance artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s demonstrated the affect of, what Bishop describes as "the phenomenological immediacy of the live body and on specific socio-economic identities."¹³⁷ Bishop further delineates how the use of bodies, as the medium and material of the work emphasized both a physical and a psychological transgression.¹³⁸ As a result this transgression, is a result of the artist's use of a disidentificatory performance to address the country's historical trauma and systematic violence.

and Flavio Garcíandia, who were all her friends, were also leaving. The government then had this unspoken law, that once you leave, they erase you." Bruguera quoted in Leslie Camhi, "ART; Her Body, Herself," *The New York Times* (NY), June 20, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/20/arts/art-her-body-herself.html>.

¹³⁶ Bruguera quoted in Muñoz, "Performing Greater Cuba," in *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* 403.

¹³⁷ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 223.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

The materials (the nude female body, the animal carcass), the process (of repetition and ritual), and the content (in its act of resistance and in its origins of indigenous myth) that made up the piece displays Bruguera's exploration of identity as a woman and a Cuban. In looking specifically at her elaboration of the experience of women, like Mendieta, she uses her body in the nude, otherwise seen as private, forbidden, and marginal in the public sphere to rupture the authoritarian structure of the public. On the other hand, her references to Afro-Cuban practices¹³⁹ and appropriation of indigenous myth displays the way in which she uses the history and culture of Cuba's marginalized communities to bring them back into the present.

The physical and psychological transgression that Bishop describes is useful in understanding the disidentificatory performance is able to divulge personal symptoms of being subjected under the state. Bruguera explicates these feelings,

It's a work in which the idea of punishment (in this case, self-punishment by "suicide" and the "erasing" of oneself) converges with the causes of guilt (submission, passivity). The first materializes in the act of eating the dirt, the second in the image of the lamb hung around my neck. The punishment is for being submissive, but that passivity is also a way to survive, and that kind of salvation is a slow death.¹⁴⁰

By reiterating these past events she evokes spectators to become apparent to the way in which feelings of punishment in guilt are, in fact, prescribed by the state. Philosopher Nancy Fraser's analysis of "Public/Private" Binarism is helpful to understanding this process.

Fraser describes how the public/private split "enclave[s] certain matters in specialized discursive arenas so as to shield them from a general debate," which "usually works to the

¹³⁹ "Afro-Cuban religious practice has generally had a rough time under the revolutionary government, which has accepted it-more or less- at certain times as a folkloric expression, but which has been wary of the traditions when they were not shorn of their religious implication as living systems of belief." Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 261.

¹⁴⁰ Octavio Zaya and Tania Bruguera, "Tania Bruguera in Conversation with Octavio Zaya," in *Cuba: Los Mapas Del Deseo [Maps of Desire]* (n.p.: Folio, 1999).

advantage of dominant groups and individuals and to the disadvantage of their subordinates.”¹⁴¹

The work as a demonstration of “guilt,” something felt personally and privately, is disrupted as it is understood as a mechanism of state control. Here, recipients are able to resonate with the indigenous persons and amongst one another, in their current state of affairs, thus eliciting an awareness of being suppressed by a dominant force and of being submissive to their own suppression. Her work, functions as a disruption, and thus manifests the private in the public realm.

The piece is layered within a contested history, however in revitalizing the cultural relevance of the myth she is able to dislodge the revolution from its paramount position. José Muñoz argues, “Stressing the tragic shock effects of the colonial encounter pulls Cuba away from the problematic and short-sighted understanding of the 1959 revolution as the crowning or central moment in Greater Cuba’s history.”¹⁴² Bruguera’s work is thus a resource in expanding the timeline of Cuba’s history, ergo displacing the 1959 revolution’s systematically centralized position.

The performance provides an anthropological source in situating Cuba in a history of dominance and resistance. In exhibiting the suicidal mythology in the present, is what I argue to be in using Muñoz’s terminology a “reiteration”. Thus providing the inverse effect to the indigenous persons’ act in “erasure of oneself”. Her performance elevates the suicidal act in order to revive the history of colonialism and to deflate the revolution’s importance within Cuba’s greater history. More so, it reveals the harmful ways in which the state inflicts a sense of guilt or punishment onto its peoples in order to maintains it

¹⁴¹ Muñoz, José Esteban, *Disidentifications*, 169.

¹⁴² Muñoz, José, “Performing Greater Cuba,” in *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* 404.

One can trace a connection between Bruguera's intentions to trace a cultural history and to provoke through disidentificatory performances in *The Burden of Truth* with Cuban-American interdisciplinary artist Coco Fusco (b. 1960) and Chicano performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña (b. 1955)'s important piece: *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit... [the West]*, 1992-1994. Debuted at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (in Sep. 1992), Fusco and Peña presented themselves as aboriginal inhabitants from an unknown island in the Gulf of Mexico. The two spent days at a time exhibited in a cage, enacting "traditional tasks," which ranged from "sewing voodoo dolls and lifting weights to watching television and working on a laptop computer."¹⁴³

They illustrate,

Our plan was to live in a golden cage for three days, presenting ourselves as undiscovered Amerindians from an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had somehow been overlooked by Europeans for five centuries. We called our homeland Guatinau, and ourselves Guatinauis.¹⁴⁴

They left a donation box in front of the cage and for a nominal fee (one dollar) Fusco would dance (to rap music), Peña would tell "authentic" Amerindian stories (in a nonsensical language), or they would pose for Polaroids with visitors [Fig. 15]. They were the spectacle of the "savage" displayed in front of an audience, in which cultural stigmas could be addressed (internally and externally) in the audiences' interaction with "the other." Their "discovery," lured the "discoverer" to construct the identity and narrative of the unknown aboriginal persons, which, analogous to the way "the other" is constructed in reality, is entirely concocted. Their performance sought to address the historical and present undercurrents of colonization subsumed in Western societies' beliefs.

¹⁴³ Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," *TDR* (1988-) 38, no. 1 (1994): 148, doi:10.2307/1146361.

¹⁴⁴ Coco Fusco, *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York City: New Press, 1995), 39.

Fusco and Peña's commitment to nonverbal communication further emphasized the distance between themselves and their viewers. They employed two "zoo guards" to correspond with visitors, take them to the bathroom on leashes, and feed them [Fig. 16]. In doing this Fusco and Peña emphasize the loss of personhood experienced in the process of "othering" individuals. Taylor expands upon this in stating, "Colonialism, after all, has deprived its captives of individuality, attempting both to create, than domesticate, barbarism."¹⁴⁵ The piece became a traveling performance in which Fusco and Peña staged themselves around the world, deliberately addressing countries that were "deeply implicated in the extermination or abuse of aboriginal peoples."¹⁴⁶ The cage, particularly, spoke to the violence of their confinement, yet also reflected the abusive history non-whites have been faced with both in the past and still in their everyday experiences.

Their role-playing was, as well, gendered in the characters they took on and as they posed themselves as a normative heterosexual couple. Their performance was steeped in stereotypes, as Fusco portrayed herself with a painted face, grass skirt and revealing bra, while Peña demonstrated typical macho cultural tropes in wearing an "enmascarado de plata" mask and displaying his bare chest. More so, they eroticized the "native." Peña's spiked gloves and dog collar, as well as the cage itself revealed tinges of sadomasochism.¹⁴⁷ As the piece developed they included a fake Encyclopaedia Britannica entry, which read: "She [Fusco] is a versatile dancer, and also enjoys showing off her domestic talents by sewing (...), serving cocktails, and massaging her male partner" [Fig. 17].¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, at the Whitney Museum in New York they added sex to their spectacle, offering a peek at "authentic Guatinaui male genitals" for five

¹⁴⁵ Taylor, "A Savage Performance," 164.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Fusco, *English is Broken Here*, 57.

dollars.¹⁴⁹ Taylor describes, “as ‘objects,’ Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña out-fetished the fetish.”¹⁵⁰ This element of performativity demonstrates their agenda in showing the ways in which gender roles and heteronormativity are already performative.

While the performance encapsulates colonial exploitation and racism, the staging of the performance and the symbolism within it scrutinized the pigeonholing of marginal communities through exaggerating and contradicting popular beliefs. For instance, their engagement in “traditional” tasks highlighted the cliché tropes imposed upon indigenous populations, while their engagement with modern technology revealed the “other” to not be the primitive savage that is otherwise supposed by Eurocentric audiences. Similarly, when paid to dance Fusco rapped instead of fabricating an indigenous dance. As props Fusco wore sunglasses and Converse high-tops and Muñoz donned black boots and a briefcase with a snake on it. In doing so they co-opted such references in order to satirize the stereotypes of the “other.” Muñoz explains, “Generally speaking, this authentic Other has to be pre-industrial, has to be more tuned with their past, has to be less tainted by post-modernity, has to be more innocent and must not live with contemporary technology.” However as Fusco points out Conchero dancers in Mexico City *do* wear Converse. Hence, their performativity makes spectators alert to the false narratives they have been constructed indiscriminately to all “indigenous” persons. These false narratives manifested in the dress, symbols, and embodiment of the performers evidence the violent ways in which the “other” becomes pigeonholed.

Furthermore, included in the scene were references to “experts,”¹⁵¹ that is individuals and scholarship that claimed to be resources for situating the indigenous persons as authentic and,

¹⁴⁹ “When the audience engaged in this invitation, Peña alternatively held his penis tucked between his legs, displaying only a “feminine” triangle.” Taylor, “A Savage Performance,” 165.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, “A Savage Performance,” 165.

more so, as disparate from Western populations. Present during the performance was an “expert” with an “Ask Me” button to explain the natives’ dress, habits, and origins. The “official” reference are called upon to validate their realness, while simultaneously are looked upon by Westerners to bolster their own place on the social hierarchy.

Fusco and Muñoz in satirizing and complicating popular belief used the comedic elements of buffoonery and parody to disrupt the dominant discourse. Taylor contextualizes their humor in stating, “there was also something Latin American, something proud, rebellious, humorous, and contemptuous in the way Fusco and Gómez-Peña approached their audiences. Pure critique, pure *relajo*.” *Relajo*, she explains is “una burla colectiva” (a collective prank), an act of sardonic devalorization, or what the late Mexican intellectual Jorge Portilla, in his book *Fenomenologia del relajo* (1984), calls “desolidarization” with dominant norms in order to create a “different, rebellious solidarity— that of the underdog.”¹⁵² Their humorizing, while ambiguous or indecipherable to many audience members, was undoubtedly perceptible for the underdog. The comedic undertones expressed in the piece functions to displace the Western claims of expertise to the absurd.

In their performance, Fusco and Muñoz heighten the use their bodies as objects. As the token of the “other” they elicited the audience’s gaze to address and reflect upon the image in which they marveled. Fusco explains that it was conceived “to create a surprise of ‘uncanny’ encounter, one in which audiences had to undergo their own process of reflection as to what they were seeing.”¹⁵³ This encounter divulges privatized notions into the public realm, by eliciting

¹⁵¹ Fusco describes that included was, “a chronology with highlights from the history of exhibiting non-Western peoples was on one didactic panel and a simulated Encyclopedia Britannica entry with a fake map of the Gulf of Mexico showing our island was on another.” Fusco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, 39.

¹⁵² Taylor, “A Savage Performance,” 173.

¹⁵³ Fusco, *English is Broken Here*, 40.

responses from audience members¹⁵⁴ in their interactive performance. The biggest revelation culminated in the fact that nearly half the visitors that saw the cage in Irvine, London, Madrid, Minneapolis, and the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. believed that the two were real captives.¹⁵⁵

The performance's use of drama and humor functions to disrupt the prevailing stereotype by amplifying its inanity. The documentary¹⁵⁶ that came in subsequence to the performance, in turn, functions as a reflective device, in which the footage may be utilized to facilitate awareness of the audience's role in perpetuating such stereotypes in the everyday. Taylor examines, "As culture becomes less a synonym for performance than its field of work, and as performance complicates our understanding of cultural practice so that we recognize the rehearsed and produced and creative nature of everyday life perhaps we may be excused for wondering who the artists are, who the ethnographer, who the dupe, who the closet colonist."¹⁵⁷ For Taylor, this performance muddles the dominant ideologies, producing a greater self awareness of the "performed," or constructed, behaviors and narratives individuals subscribe to.

Fusco and Muñoz's disidentification is enacted by naming and tackling the way in which colonization strips the identity of the indigenous person, while demystifying the identities that are, in turn, inscribed upon them by their colonizers. In ridiculing the authoritarian sphere, they constitute a narrative that functions to be recognizable and identified with minority populations.

¹⁵⁴ Anna Johnson, Coco Fusco, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña," *Bomb Magazine*, January 1993, n.p. The response amongst audience members was wildly diverse. On one hand, there were feelings of guilt and concern for their well-being (in which one individual was compelled to call the Humane Society) and on the other there were those who made sexualized comments and gestures (foolishly mimicking the sounds of gorillas or "Indians") and even those who tried to penetrate the cage that Fusco and Muñoz were in.

¹⁵⁵ Muñoz, narrates how they were mistake as "true natives somehow tainted by the detritus of technology and popular culture." Johnson, Fusco, and Gómez-Peña, "Coco Fusco." Unknown to the audience, Fusco and Muñoz were filming not only their performance, but, also, the subsequent array of responses it evoked by the audience's interactions.

¹⁵⁶ "The Couple in the Cage: Guatianaui Odyssey," 1993.

¹⁵⁷ Taylor, "A Savage Performance," 172.

The cultural critique that is made up in the underlying meanings of the piece is able to intervene on the perpetuating assemblences of minorities, in order to resist its preeminence within the public sphere. In result from such critique, or counterpublicity, is the possibility for reflection and for perceptions of other-ized individuals to be expanded beyond the limited scopes that prevail within the dominant discourse.

Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance has a similitude to Mendieta's *Untitled* (Ape Piece), performed at the All Iowa Fair in 1975. Wearing an ape costume, Mendieta similarly employed a Caucasian handler and presented herself to the public in an enclosure where she could be viewed by others. Her action uses the more general painful racial stereotypes in amalgamation with her own experiences of discrimination growing up as a non-white in the Midwest, however, the message of the work was, for the most part, lost on the fair's general audience.¹⁵⁸

Similar to Bruguera's piece (*The Burden of Guilt*) that I describe in the beginning of this chapter, her piece, *The Body of Silence*, 1997-1998 [Fig. 18] consisted of the artist sitting naked in a box of lamb meat, with a state published history book for elementary school students. In the performance Bruguera goes through a process of "correcting" the book's nationalized history. However, out of fear of political consequence she begins to tear the pages out and swallow them as a demonstration of self-censorship. This is exemplary in tying together her predecessors' (Mendieta and Elso's) interest in using the body as a tool to demonstrate the psychological and social impacts of state repression. Her performance draws from her own personal experiences in self-censoring out of fear, yet the psychological impact re-positioned in the public sphere functions to make a ground-level assault onto those whom enact the violence of censorship and

¹⁵⁸ Viso, "The Memory of History," in *Ana Mendieta Earth Body*, 133.

suppression onto her mind in the first place. In symbolizing the harmful conditions of the state as physical afflictions, that is she reiterates the psychological pain onto her physical body to reveal it to and in confrontation with the dominant sphere.

During the 1990s Bruguera engaged in the praxis Mendieta and Elso had laid out for her by using viscerally charged rituals that were underpinned with metaphors of critique. These critique came at a time and place that was ridden with experiences of “censorship, repression, depression, and often exile and emigration. Such social hardships incited Bruguera and her peers to use their art as a way of locating themselves in the transgression through such limits, as opposed to merely remaining inside or out. In this Bruguera is able to maintain a “working on and against” mentality, in which she remained situated in her home country in Cuba (despite the amount of her friends who had left) and pointed her art toward confronting the state’s rules, regulations, and inconsistencies in upholding them.

Chapter 3

While Bruguera's *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* series and related performative pieces were formative moments for Bruguera, she began approaching the performative in less of a self-sacrificial process and more toward one that is informed by the "The Social Body," that is in communication and social interaction. Unsatisfied with the theatricality of performance art, and the feminist critical industry that sprang up around her earlier pieces, Bruguera began to remove her body from her work and to explore social behavior and politics through audience conduct.¹⁵⁹ When Bruguera began her career as a performance artist she was not familiar with Mendieta's early performances, which, at that point in her career, were tinged more toward overt social action. Bruguera expressed a keenness for such pieces after visiting a retrospective of Mendieta's work at the Whitney Museum. Mosquera notes, "Bruguera thus evolved from a mystical poetics to social action, the reverse of Mendieta's path."¹⁶⁰ Bruguera's use of disidentifications may be drawn from her later works, however, she turned her works away from self-identified performances and toward sites that looked to unnerve her audience members, in what I argue to be acts of "relational antagonism."

In the late 1990s Bruguera began pursuing a MFA in performance at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago's politically charged art scene¹⁶¹ motivated Bruguera to look beyond her individualized performances and toward art "gestures", or what she terms "Arte de Conducta" (loosely translated as Behavior Art)¹⁶². She explains her reasoning behind this in saying, "I want the audience to access the piece as an experience, sometimes a physical

¹⁵⁹ Bass, "Biography," in *Tania Bruguera On the Political Imaginary*, 129-130.

¹⁶⁰ Mosquera, "Cuba in Tania Bruguera's Work," in *Tania Bruguera On the Political Imaginary*, 31.

¹⁶¹ Chicago's art scene and its history of political action groups and events, like the Weather Underground Organization, the Black Panthers, and the demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic convention"; Bass, "Biography," in *Tania Bruguera On the Political Imaginary*, , 129-130.

¹⁶² "Conducta", in Spanish means "to conduct" or to "be a conduit". Bruguera uses this term in relating it to "behavior" as well as social manners. Bruguera, in "Being Cuban," interview by Goldberg, 19.

experience, and to carry the ‘documentation’ [through their emotions] of it with them as their own lived memory.”¹⁶³ *Sin título [Untitled]* (Havana, 2000), 2000, 2018 was Bruguera’s first major work of Arte de Conducta and her first investigation into the political imaginary of places.¹⁶⁴

The piece initially, a part of the 7th Havana Biennial,¹⁶⁵ was exhibited in the tunnels of the Cabaña Fortress, a military bunker used to imprison, torture and kill prisoners of conscious during the Cuban Revolution. However due to its controversial political commentary— in denunciation of the actions of the revolutionaries’— Cuban authority’s censored the piece shortly after its inauguration. The piece had already faced objection prior to its censorship at the Biennial. Bruguera had originally titled the piece *Ingenieros de Almas* (Engineers of the Soul), appropriated from the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow in 1934,¹⁶⁶ but was forced to change it.¹⁶⁷ As a result she entitled the piece *Untitled* (Havana, 2000) in honor of exiled Cuban-American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “who customarily titled his works ‘Untitled’ in order to highlight the viewer’s role in the construction of meaning.”¹⁶⁸

Her intention to have the viewer be active in the construction of the piece’s ultimate unfolding is an essential aspect to her participatory art. The transformation from audience to

¹⁶³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶⁴ Bass, “Biography,” in *Tania Bruguera On the Political Imaginary*, 129-130.

¹⁶⁵ “The Havana biennial exists largely for the gaze of Western centers, and depends symbolically on legitimation from these same centers. Cuban officials go to great lengths to cultivate supporters in Western centers knowing that revolutionary lore continues to attract many to the island. The biennial could not exist without Western subsidies — in the form of philanthropic support from European foundations and the tourist dollars that biennial visitors spend. Bishop and Fusco, “Public Address,” 38.

¹⁶⁶ Stalin had declared that “the production of souls is more important than the production of tanks” and that artists were the “engineers of the soul.” Bruguera, “Statement”.
<http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/146-0-Untitled+Havana+2000.htm>.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Tania Bruguera and Stuart Comer, “Stuart Comer in Conversation with Tania Bruguera” December 2017,” in *Tania Bruguera Untitled (Havana, 2000) Brochure, February 3 - March 11, 2018* (n.p.: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018).

participant was pioneered by Allan Kaprow's (1927-1996) "Happenings"— "a post-theater practice situated in particular locations with the intention of blurring distinctions between public and play"— in New York in the late 1950s. Happenings strived to eliminate the aspect of audience from the performative work through "the intensification of feeling, the play of instinct, a sense of festivity, [and] social agitation."¹⁶⁹ Kaprow explains through "heightening the experience of the everyday" Happenings generated "not only a space, a set of relationships to the various things around it, and a range of values, but an overall atmosphere as well, which penetrates it and whoever experiences it."¹⁷⁰ Kaprow's reformulation of identity from passive spectator to active engager is useful in understanding Bruguera's intentions in *Untitled (Havana, 2000)*. Lambert-Beatty acknowledges the similarities between Bruguera and Kaprow's discontents with their early art interventions. She describes,

Frustrated by the ease with which the happenings were recuperated as art world spectacles (...), Kaprow "spent much of his career thereafter articulating alternatives, using terms like 'events,' 'non-theatrical performance,' 'unart,' 'lifelike art,' and 'research' for a practice that sometimes looked like strange sociology experiments (...) and sometimes like mediation (...)."¹⁷¹

This theory lends itself to the process Bruguera engages in in her later works. The work, as a space calls on the audience to become a part of the culmination of the piece's work.

After being banned by Cuban authorities, *Untitled (Havana, 2000)* [Fig. 19] was recreated almost two decades later, however, this time protected and celebrated within the institution of New York's Museum of Modern Art. The piece was acquired by curator Stuart Comer in 2003, and he and Bruguera worked together to reproduce the same elements as its original conception, in order to convey the interactive experience of the formative piece. For

¹⁶⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 94.

¹⁷⁰ Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, expanded pbk. ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003), 15-18.

¹⁷¹ Lambert-Beatty, "Political People: Notes on Arte de Conducta," *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*, 41.

Bruguera visual representation via document, photo, or video would not give the participant the experience that is so quintessential to her work.

When visitors arrive to see the piece they are led to a large waiting room, due to the limited amount of people able to enter at once. The wait that visitors are to endure before being able to experience the piece is in fact done purposefully, in part to emulate the customary waits Cubans are forced to undergo in order to attain goods and services in the country. This waiting, an infringement on their time and ability to access resources, that Cubans are so often faced with is used by authoritarian governments as a method of control. The waiting experience at the MoMA prompted mixed responses. Inherent in waiting there is a decision made by the visitor to undergo the time in line in order to see the art piece. Bruguera is critical of the way in which Western entertainment does not give audience members ability to make their own decisions. She emphasizes that she wants visitors to understand that her art does not function as entertainment, therefore the wait also compels visitors to actively choose to be present, before they even enter the piece.

The piece itself is entered first through an arched door to an empty vault, to imitate the original piece's original location in the Cabaña Fortress. From the vault the visitors step into a dark, almost entirely unlit, room carpeted in sugarcane bagasse [Fig. 20]. The lack of light and uneven grounding is disorienting, even fear-inducing for the visitor. In situating themselves the viewers are prompted toward the only source of light, a black-and-white television monitor embedded in the ceiling, displaying a video of compiled footage of Fidel both in public and private settings [Fig. 21]. However, while not immediately apparent, surrounding the video are

four performers. Bruguera's intention is for visitors to become vigilant of Castro's seductive nature.¹⁷²

The footage, taken mostly from a propaganda film by Estela Bravo (an American documentary filmmaker) is comprised of images of Fidel swimming in the ocean, giving public speeches, and, perhaps, most noteworthy revealing his chest without a bullet-proof vest demonstrating his courage and untouchability. The images shed light onto Castro's private life, which are essentially taboo subjects among Cuban civilians.¹⁷³ The deliberate choice to present certain images consequently informs a certain narrative. Castro's domination over mass media in Cuba maintains a spectacularized view of the revolution. Bruguera uses the TV to call attention to the way in which Castro uses mass media to purport himself to be "of the people."

While in the piece, the participant has the agency to move about at their own will within the confines of the space, however when the participant comes into contact with the TV, the images are selected and imposed upon them, underlining Castro's agency over his subjects. The TV, situated in the center of the room, over the heads of the participants, is suggestive to Castro's ever-present nature. Furthermore the overpowering presence of Castro subsumes all else in the room, pushing the performers to the periphery, if not creating the illusion that they are invisible under his dominance.

The nude performers are all men and all are either Cuban or of Cuban descent. The absence of women is reflective of the machismo culture in Cuba, in which men hold the dominant roles in society. Bruguera here is particularly pointing to the glorification of men in the revolution and in the political sphere. Each performer repeats a specific action: one

¹⁷² Bruguera, "Being Cuban," interview by Goldberg, 16-17. Bruguera describes the expectation she assumes visitors to have in discovering the performers.

¹⁷³ "In late 1991 the guidelines for representations of Fidel were revised: it was forbidden to show him standing next to anybody taller or to show him eating, and it was forbidden to divulge any information on his personal life." Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 119.

continually puts his hands in and out of his mouth [Fig. 22], a symbolization of self censorship, the action of filtering through one's words or wishing to take back something already said. Another bends over forward, but in doing so he keeps his eyes remained fixed on the participant, as if they are bowing resentfully. The third brushes his skin with his hands [Fig. 23], inspired by the closing scene of Akira Kurosawa's 1957 film *Throne of Blood*,¹⁷⁴ an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in which the character Asaji feverishly washes her blood-stained hands (just as Lady Macbeth does) to rid of her guilt.¹⁷⁵ And in the final gesture the performer raises his arms behind his head, alluding to being subjected to a person of enforcement.

The actions are compulsive, pathological creating an eerie sense of being entrapped physically in the prison and psychologically under Castro's revolutionary ideology. Bruguera mentioned in conversation these gestures are suppose to be without resolution.¹⁷⁶ The performers are stuck in their repetition, yet nothing comes to culminate out of enacting these gestures. One can connect their compulsive behaviours to entrapment within their conscious, thus demonstrating the weight of the guilt that has been imposed upon them.

The performers were partially inspired by Michelangelo's (1475-1564) *Slaves* (also referred to *Prisoners* or *Captives*), c. 1513-1516.¹⁷⁷ The *Slaves*, carved in marble, were left in an "unfinished state," that is, the whole human body is not depicted. What is seen is most of the torso, thighs and arms, still attached to the raw slabs of marble [Fig. 24]. The statues left in an unfinished state shows Michelangelo's creative process, while obfuscating the the piece's

¹⁷⁴ Conversation with Bruguera, February, 23, 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Asaji's guilt has driven her to madness. She scrubs her hands to try to remove the blood and guilt, nonetheless, is unable to rid of it.

¹⁷⁶ Conversation with Bruguera, February, 23, 2018.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

interpretation.¹⁷⁸ Bruguera uses these qualities metaphorically, by obscuring the performers in the darkness of the room and intentionally leaving the piece in a state in an “unfinished state,” that is, she finds the participants integration into the piece as necessary in contributing to the process of the piece’s unfolding.

The statues (in *Slaves*) are bound to the marble, struggling to be released. This symbolization is as well emulated in Bruguera’s performers as they too desire to be liberated from their confinement in the prison. *Slaves* has also been referred to as Michelangelo’s *Soldiers*, to guard something in power; in Bruguera’s piece they, as well, function to protect the undisputed power of Castro. However Bruguera’s performers are real, their actions are live, and their relationship to Cuba is rooted in their personal or familial experiences. As it happens, two or three of the performers have or had relatives that were tortured or killed in similar prisons.¹⁷⁹ It is this element of corporeality that Bruguera stresses her notion of the body as something that accumulates the impact of life events, and thus that history, that knowledge, becomes transposed in the piece.¹⁸⁰ This is what Comer refers to as “body to body transmissions.”¹⁸¹

The piece, as a whole, is extremely sensory and the isolation within it creates a visceral experience. Although sight typically dominates our senses, due to the well-nigh blackness in this space participants become more keen to the sounds and scents of the enveloping site. While otherwise silent, the sounds of people stepping on the sugarcane and of the performer’s

¹⁷⁸ Schultz explains that Michelangelo's *non finito* portrays how “a great artist could abandon work without blame, because his idea was always more important than their realization.” Juergen Schulz, “Michelangelo's Unfinished Works,” *The Art Bulletin* 57, no. 3 (September 1975): 366, doi:10.2307/3049404.

¹⁷⁹ Comer, Stuart, “Tania Bruguera Untitled (Havana, 2000), MoMA LIVE,” YouTube video 13:15, January 30, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=22&v=L9fKj5lsZec.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 24:40.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 13:25.

brushing themselves creates an eerie ambiance. On the other hand, the potent scent of the sugarcane bagasse is overwhelming.

The bagasse itself refers to the sugar production in Cuba (at once producing a forth of the world's sugar) and subjugation of those working in the industry. Particularly she is commenting on the country's history of the slave trade and exploitation of its sugarcane workers even after their emancipation.¹⁸² However it has continued to be relevant within her lifetime, markedly when the revolutionaries defeated Fulgencio Batista's government, "Cuba had a sugar industry stronger than the gambling dens and casinos administered by the Mafia, which was justly demonized by the propaganda of the new regime. Yet unsurprisingly, after 1958, the revolutionary movement grounded its future economic plan in the sugar cane industry."¹⁸³ Then again in 1993, under the "Special Period" the national leadership set the goal of harvesting 70 percent of the sugar crop by hand, literally inverting the extent to which the nation had managed to mechanize that industry during the preceding two decades.¹⁸⁴ Her use of the sugarcane is poignant to the senses and thus impresses the historical significance of exploitation in the country on the mind of the participant. Rangel articulates that its scent "activates a stream of memories."¹⁸⁵

Bruguera further explains the functioning of entering the site as a means of being activated into the site. She describes, "the length of the passageway provided the time needed for your eyes to adjust and start seeing what had been invisible—and this is the turning point

¹⁸² "By 1910, nearly twenty-five years after their emancipation in 1886, the harsh existence and low social status of the majority of black Cuban sugarcane workers remained unchanged in many ways." Philip A. Howard, *Black Labor, White Sugar: Caribbean Braceros and Their Struggle for Power in the Cuban Sugar Industry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

¹⁸³ Gabriela Rangel, "Tania Bruguera's Once-Censored Installation Measures the Distance Between Words and Things," *Hyperallergic*, March 8, 2018.

¹⁸⁴ Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 154.

¹⁸⁵ Rangel, "Tania Bruguera's."

of the piece: the moment you cannot ignore what is happening anymore, the moment you cease to be a visitor and become a witness, an accomplice.”¹⁸⁶ By looking at this structure one can understand the transition from spectator to participant, as the individual progresses within the piece. It is here that the sensorial nature modifies the participant’s understanding of and within the space, by enticing to the participant’s conscious. I stress this alteration as it reinforces the agency of the art piece as a site in which Bruguera’s audience members are antagonized through the piece. Whether it is similar to their personal experiences or not, such unease and discomfort inherent in the piece allows for both Cubans and foreigners to engage and reflect upon their interaction within the artwork.

The darkness is important not only as a sensorial element, but also a figurative element, which Comer argues can be analogous with Plato (427—347 B.C.E.)’s *Allegory of the Cave* (514a–520a).¹⁸⁷ In an interview with Comer, Bruguera explains,

Darkness is used as the opposite of enlightenment, as a metaphor for ignorance and fear. The long, dark walk through the prison corridor provided time to think through your feelings, to explore your own ignorance of a place where only the light emanating from the image of one man can be seen, not the eleven million people over whom he had power.¹⁸⁸

This is integral to understanding the use of the piece. The *Allegory of the Cave*, I argue, does not reflect the performers but rather the participants as the prisoners of the cave.

The cave distorts the prisoner’s perception of objects, in which the shadows they are observing are mistaken as real in their limited scope of the world. When exposed to the light outside the cave the prisoners become aware of a world previously unknown to them. The master of images within the cave, who is admired for being knowledgeable within the

¹⁸⁶ Bruguera and Comer, “Stuart Comer in Conversation,” 5.

¹⁸⁷ Comer, Tania Bruguera Untitled (Havana, 2000), MoMA LIVE,” 23:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=22&v=L9fKj5IsZec

¹⁸⁸ Bruguera and Comer, “Stuart Comer in Conversation,” 5.

limitations of the cave, in reality holds no truth— a parallel for Castro’s facade within the context of Cuba. *The Allegory* ultimately emphasizes the value of exposing oneself to perceptions that go beyond their preconceived notions.

Plato’s *Allegory* essentially is understood as a metaphor for the importance of education, however, Plato does not maintain that individuals become more enlightened through a didactical relationship. Instead he asserts,

the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so to the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being.¹⁸⁹

Plato demonstrates that individuals could not necessarily be told to believe in something. He postulates that knowledge is attained on an individual exploration and analyzation, allowing each person to come to their own truth. This furthermore, supports the usefulness in “experiencing” Bruguera’s work. One can understand *Untitled (Havana 2000)* to be a dialectical process, in which there is a interdependent relationship between the artist and participant. The participant will understand the piece in amalgamation with their own life personal experiences and in turn are able to give new meaning to the piece and to the real events in which it mirrors.

Bruguera explicates that she wants her participants to understand their own complicity within power dynamics.¹⁹⁰ To Bruguera, Castro’s aim is to stop citizens from critically thinking.¹⁹¹ Her piece subverts Castro’s seduction by asking attendees to participate, to think critically about the site, and hopefully in turn initiate discussion or action after leaving the site. She is able to do this through engendering fear throughout the piece. Bruguera finds that fear

¹⁸⁹ Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 777.

¹⁹⁰ Comer, “Tania Bruguera: *Untitled (Havana, 2000)*, MoMA LIVE,” 22:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=22&v=L9fKj5IsZec.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 34:45.

alerts the spectator to more alert or conscious.¹⁹² She states, “Fear also is a way to learn and once we know how to handle fear we can be free.”¹⁹³ Given that, this quality of fear can be understood (within the frame of relational aesthetics) as the antagonistic quality this is pushing the boundaries of society. It can be argued that in identifying one’s fear the boundaries (set by the Cuban political system) which incite/give rise to the population’s subduction, are unhinged from their position of durability.

The work suggests private things, pain, an exculpating tangle of sensations and possible meanings. The text accompanying the piece reads, “You are alone here,” her accompanying text read, ‘or not. You are implicated. . . . You’ve been standing there for some forty years, or maybe five minutes. . . . Your feet sink in the milled, useless and infertile sugarcane as you head back toward the greater light. (Have you always walked this way?).” Here, Bruguera is pushing her participants to question their complicity. She forces Cubans to enter the vault and face the presence of Castro. She asks them have they strayed outside of their perspective, forcing them to look toward new perspectives.

To underpin the usefulness of the overlapping theories within Plato’s *Allegory* and Bishop’s “relational antagonism,” Bruguera’s work constitutes a space that not only mobilizes the senses, but also incites the urge to respond. The “realness” of the piece treats the visitor as a participant. I will look toward another example of this process within another politically contentious moment in Latin America: Argentina in the 1960s. Argentine art at this time, was heavily swayed by the works of Oscar Masotta (1930-1979).¹⁹⁴ Bishop describes his influenced impacted artists to be “more cerebral and self-reflexive; its performances are less visually

¹⁹² Bruguera, “Being Cuban,” interview by Goldberg, 17.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 106. Masotta, was a writer and intellectual best known for introducing Lacanian psychoanalysis into Argentina.

oriented, and more willing to tarry with nihilistic consequences of producing coercive situations.”¹⁹⁵

Argentine conceptual artist Graciela Carnevale (b.1942)’s piece *Acción del Encierro* (Confinement Action), 1968 was a part of the “Ciclo de Arte Experimental” (Cycle of Experimental Art)¹⁹⁶ exhibition in Rosario. Carnevale invited spectators into a neutral gallery space in which there was one glass wall, although it was covered in posters to maintain the neutrality of the room [Fig. 25], and then preceded to exit the room, locking the door behind her. The spectators were left, confined in the walls of the space without any prompt [Fig. 26]. Carnevale explains, “I have taken prisoners. The point is to allow people to enter and to prevent them from leaving [Fig. 27]. Here the work comes into being and these people are the actors. There is no possibility of escape, in fact the spectators have no choice; they are obliged, violently, to participate.”¹⁹⁷ Carnevale, in constraining the participants in a claustrophobic environment amongst strangers, created an environment of distress. The work is engaged in whether the participant responds neutrally or in agitation.

The outcome for the participants is unknown. Left in a state of growing anxiety, the participants must choose whether to wait it out, remain hopeful for someone or something to intervene, or break down the glass wall [Fig. 28]. The project is explicit in its aims: do you remain passive or active? Carnevale, like Bruguera, looks to address the organization of power and quashing of resistance within society, not only among dissidents but in everyday submissions to dominant systematic forms of power. Carnevale depicts this sentiment, “I think

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁹⁶ “(...) The Rosario group debated the issues of the day: dictatorship, repression, censorship, and mainly, the canonical idea of art put in jeopardy. Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea, *Inverted Utopias: Avant-garde Art in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 561.

¹⁹⁷ Carnevale, quoted in Andrea Giunta and Ines Katzenstein, eds., *Listen, Here, Now!: Argentine Art of the 1960s : Writings of the Avant-garde* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 299-301.

an important element in the conception of the work is the consideration of the natural impulses that get repressed by a social system designed to create passive beings, to generate resistance to action, to deny, in sum, the possibility of change.”¹⁹⁸ This quote is useful in demonstrating the way in which Carnevale attempts to agitate society to look beyond the enclosed borders created by the social imagination.

Bruguera and Carnevale’s intentions overlap in calling on the participant to understand the piece as a feeling or a metaphor of a physical and psychological imprisonment. Unlike Bruguera, who intentionally lets the audience determine for themselves whether or not to participate, Carnevale does not give them any choice. Carnevale thus heightens the sense of peril by depriving her participants of a “safe” way out. However, she as well leaves them with a choice in their course of action.

Confinement Action likewise is an experience, in which in an act of agitation the spectators become participants, who thus feel the immediacy of the situated environment firsthand and, more so, can draw parallels to their context in the reality of Argentina. Political unrest was heavily interwoven in the culture at that time. General Juan Carlos Onganía¹⁹⁹ had recently risen to power as a military dictator after overthrowing elected president Arturo Illia in a coup d’état in 1966. Students of the University of Buenos Aires organized to protest in the immediate aftermath, which subsequently resulted in the Federal Police’s violent suppression in what became known as the La Noche de los Bastones Largos (Night of the Long Batons). It was these

¹⁹⁸ Junta and Katzenstein, *Listen, Here*, 300.

¹⁹⁹ Onganía became dictator of Argentina from 1966-1970. “This period is characterized by fierce state violence, censorship, and repression, the systematic dissolution of public life, and the closure and strict control of educational and cultural institutions.” Eve Kalyva, “The Rhetoric of Disobedience: Art and Power in Latin America,” *Latin American Studies Association* 51, no. 2 (2016): 47.

events that eventually led to the notorious Tucumán Arde (Tucumán is Burning),²⁰⁰ which Carnevale herself participated in.

It is in these situations of “real” experience, that Bruguera and Carnevale alike, grip the participant within their piece in order to divulge their suppression and their possible participation within their suppression. Bishop reflects upon Carnevale’s piece in stating,

The provocation of this entity, and the unpredictability of its response, constitute the core of the work’s artistic and political resonance. (...) Carnevale’s event is both metaphorical and phenomenological: to make the audience aware of, and to feel in their own bodies, the violence they were living in (‘we couldn’t stay neutral, we needed to make an action to get out of this imprisonment’).²⁰¹

In the immediate aftermath of the shutdown of *Ciclo de Arte Experimental* many of the groups artists began collaborating with sociologists, journalists and artists from Buenos Aires in an exhibition of counter-propaganda in defense of exploited sugar workers in the northern province of Tucumán.²⁰² This group’s exhibition, which became known as *Tucumán Arde*, was “conceived as a denunciation of a corrupt government and as a call to revolt. (...) the aim was to expose the viewer to the reality of social injustice, and to generate press that would reveal the truth of the situation.”²⁰³ Here I find the events of *Tucumán Arde* to connect the dots between Carnevale’s antagonistic act and its productiveness in resisting and rethinking dominant ideology past the situated event within *Confinement Action*.

²⁰⁰ An Argentinean political movement, conceived some weeks after the *Primer Encuentro Nacional de Vanguardia* (First National Avant-Garde Encounter), when artists from Rosario and Buenos Aires attempted to impel collective works based on a ‘new aesthetic’ of artistic effectiveness and social provocation. Enticed by, among other things, street riots and the abrupt end of the *Ciclo de Arte Experimental* (Cycle of Experimental Art, 1968) in Rosario, these artists were determined to, as Leon Ferrari put it, “change the public” and unnerve it with the “totally different aesthetic intentions” of the biggest collective avant-garde event in 1960s in Argentina.” Ramírez and Olea, *Inverted Utopias*, 574.

²⁰¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 121.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Bishop, in *Artificial Hells*, 121.

Following *Untitled (Havana, 2000)*, Bruguera similarly conceived a scene of turbulence again in her series *El susurro de Tatlin (Tatlin's Whisper)*,²⁰⁴ an ongoing series of action that reproduce images familiar from real life as direct and participatory experiences for the viewer.²⁰⁵ Specifically in *El susurro de Tatlin (Tatlin's Whisper) #5*, 2008 [Fig. 30], the artist used mounted policemen to enact crowd-control techniques in the Turbine Hall at London's Tate Modern [Fig. 30]. The exits were blocked, and viewers were herded amongst the Hall, administered into groups and then dispersed back into the crowd [Fig. 31]. The audience was in effect treated as if they were intending to spark trouble, like a mob. Bruguera intentionally chose to enact the piece in a place assumed to be non-threatening, in which visitors can enjoy art unhindered. In a turn of events, the mounted police's coercive force, in effect, implemented confusion and trepidation. In a second version of the piece, museum-goers arriving at the exhibition were first patted down and their bags were searched before they could enter.

Tatlin's Whisper #5's unfolding within the Tate (to an audience of Europeans) led visitors to experience an incredulous confrontation with authority. However, its obfuscation in the presentation of real police in uniform enacting real techniques of control quickly reminded audiences of the state's prevalent force. Staged as a real event, visitors responded accordingly to the commands [Fig. 32]. It is in this site of agitation, that the artist encourages participants to question authority and their own conditioned responses in the face of it.

Additionally, the invasive security forces were employed in effect to critique the oppressive tendencies of the state. Dionah Pérez-Rementería analyzes, "the piece might suggest the argument that disciplinary measures presume and *create* the very threats they are meant to

²⁰⁴ The name *Tatlin's Whisper* is a reference to Russian artist and architect Vladimir Tatlin who created the Tower Monument, foreseen as the seat for the Third Communist International, an icon of the enthusiasm and grandiosity of the Bolshevik Revolution.

²⁰⁵ Bishop, "Speech Disorder," 121.

deter.”²⁰⁶ This may be pointed toward Westerners who assume the state’s role to be one of protection, as opposed to Cubans who have endured a history of censorship and repression. Nonetheless, Bruguera effectively reinstates to her Western audience that freedom of expression is not always a guarantee.

Instead of situating the piece as a reflection of real events, like she did in *Untitled* (Havana, 2000), *Tatlin’s Whisper* is unveiled within reality. However, her antagonistic act is rooted with ameliorative intentions. Bruguera explains,

(...) I only stage a situation and let people be the actors. (...), it's about activating a process of self-awareness for each of the participants, or letting them experiment with different reactions to a potential situation - and maybe next time, when it happens in real life, they will have a better understanding of themselves and how they would like to respond to that situation.”²⁰⁷

It is clear that while Bruguera employs various power strategies throughout her pieces, she remains intent on rousing the spectator toward becoming vigilant and reflexive, in order to unveil the same mechanisms that make up the piece.

The arresting sites that Bruguera and Carnevale devise of can be traced back to Mendieta’s *Untitled* (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt), 1973. Documented in a number of slides and a Super-8 film, Mendieta framed her piece in a moment of the unexpected. Subsequent to *Rape Piece*, Mendieta arranged a site of violence outside her apartment. On the sidewalk was a pool of blood, seeping from under her door [Fig. 33]. The intention was to captivate the array of responses casual passersby had to the unsightly viscera. However, unlike *Rape Piece*, and more similar to the antagonistic works Bruguera and Carnevale were engaging in, the piece remained entirely anonymous. Framing the participant as the subject of the piece.

²⁰⁶ Pérez-Rementería, quoted in Lambert-Beatty, “Political People,” *Tania Bruguera On the Political Imaginary*, 43.

²⁰⁷ Bruguera, “How to Make,” interview by Mitchell, 58.

In dispersing the blood amongst the sidewalk, Mendieta provoked viewers toward responding to the unidentifiable site of violence [Fig. 34]. In remarking upon the recent rape crime, she remarked that the event had “moved and frightened” her. With this in my, she further explains, “I think all my work has been like that—a personal response to a situation ... I can’t see being theoretical about an issue like that.”²⁰⁸ As Mendieta remained inconspicuously near-by she perceived that the, “The horrific implications of the blood seem to arouse little curiosity in the unwitting participants of the piece, demonstrating a social indifference to violence that lies at the core of Mendieta’s concerns.”²⁰⁹ These actions were reminiscent of *Blood Signs* (Body Tracks), in which she stages a scene of overt violence, but removes any narrative to the piece. Thus leaving participants to comprehend the situation in their own doing.

In following this pattern Bruguera exhibited a riskier display of antagonism back home in Cuba. In accepting Guillermo Gomez-Peña’s invitation to participate in the 2009 Havana Biennial, Bruguera conceived of *Tatlin’s Whisper #6* (Havana Version) [Fig. 36]. The staged podium portrayed as a political rally that I introduced in the opening of this project unfolded as a monumental event: “for the first time in half a century a free public tribune was allowed for people to express their ideas.”²¹⁰ The piece, the sixth within her *Tatlin’s Whisper* series,²¹¹ was contrived to be as real as possible. It is through the decontextualization of the event that socialized beliefs are brought to the forefront.

The woman I describe in the introduction was Lupe Alvarez, a well-known Cuban art critic from the 1990s who returned from exile in Ecuador for the event. Fusco describes her

²⁰⁸ Mendieta, quoted in *Ana Mendieta*, 90.

²⁰⁹ Iles, “Subtle Bodies,” in *Ana Mendieta Earth Body*, 209.

²¹⁰ Mosquera, “Cuba in Tania Bruguera’s Work,” 26.

²¹¹ Bishop, “Speech Disorder,” 121. Of which, Bruguera aimed to reproduce images from real life as direct and participatory experiences for the viewer.

wordless anguish to be “perhaps the most sincere expression of the generalized frustration of several generations of Cuban intellectuals in the face of ongoing political interim.”²¹² This was possible because the artwork itself was made to have participants imagine it as *real*. Alvarez’s engagement in the event speaks to the political history in which the piece was framed.

Bruguera developed her conception for the Biennial partly in response to the autocratic characteristic of Fidel Castro’s speeches. Placed on the shoulder of each speaker at the podium was a white dove, a satirical reference to the white dove that landed on Fidel’s shoulder upon his January 8th, 1959 address to the nation, the first after the Triumph of the Revolution. At the time of the revolution the dove represented peace after decades of turmoil and promise of an egalitarian state to come. Whereas the dove in *Tatlin’s Whisper #6* was a display of the insubstantiality of Castro’s claims, it also reinstated the proposal of utopia to a new generation of Cubans.

In total thirty-nine participants were each given a minute behind the podium free from censorship. Posner addresses, “this call tapped into deep emotions in a country that has repressed free speech for over fifty years and where the consequences of self-expression can be grave.”²¹³ Furthermore, Bishop, who sat in the audience noted, “that many of the young speakers didn’t know how to use a microphone seemed telling: It was the first moment in their lives that they were in a position of public address.”²¹⁴

Bruguera issued two hundred disposable cameras to the audience to ensure that documentation could circulate around the island.²¹⁵ The burst of camera flashes that appeared as

²¹² Bishop and Fusco, “Public Address,” 38.

²¹³ Helaine Posner, “History Lessons: Tania Bruguera,” in *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium*, by Eleanor Heartney, et al. (New York: Prestel, 2013), 196.

²¹⁴ Bishop and Fusco, “Public Address,” 40.

²¹⁵ This was done out of the fact that most Cubans at the the time did not have access to the internet.

each person approached the podium strategically prevented state censorship, but also denoted the performative quality of typical political addresses even in countries with free speech.

This event may not seem revolutionary to audiences in the West, under the guise of a quasi-totalitarian government Bruguera created an entirely unanticipated event. Instead of being enlisted to a domineering speech made by Fidel Castro, participants expressed their beliefs often exuding feelings of vexation toward the state of Cuba and its political system. However engaging in this in Cuba (during the Biennial)²¹⁶ added another complex layer. The Biennial organizers and State Security in relying on the self-censorship of Cuban citizens did not prepare for such dissent to take place.²¹⁷ In the occasion that this was the case Bruguera conceived of the empty podium as a “monument to the void.”²¹⁸

Bruguera explains, “What I like about Tatlin's Whisper is that it unveiled all the systems they use. It unveiled very clearly the mechanisms they employ against people they don't like.”²¹⁹ More so, it tested the limits of acceptable behavior under a totalitarian regime. In December 2014, two weeks after President Barack Obama's announcement that the United States would begin normalizing relations with Cuba, Bruguera attempted to mount the piece again, this time in the symbolic political center of Cuba, Havana's Plaza de la Revolución. The performance failed to take place, as Bruguera along with twelve other potential participants were arrested before arriving at the square.

Despite the fact that the planned event was never able to take place, a performance was still exhibited by actors of authority. The takeaway became not so much about what ultimately

²¹⁶ Fusco notes that, “it is not just art but the state itself that is on display during such an international forum.” Bishop and Fusco, “Public Address,” 38.

²¹⁷ Mosquera, “Cuba in Tania Bruguera's Work,” 27.

²¹⁸ This is in reference to the Castro's relative absence in more recent years, “after fifty years of being a daily, overwhelming presence for Cubans.” Bruguera, quoted in Ibid.

²¹⁹ Bruguera, “Tania Bruguera: In the Studio,” interview by Jeppesen, 132.

Bruguera intended to take place at Plaza de la Revolucion, but rather the panic that the Cuban authorities exhibited . Helguera explains, “Cuba lives in a perpetual state of hysterical manipulation, and any person - whether an artist or not - who manages to break that balance will of course be viewed with terror and indignation.”²²⁰ Their absolute refusal to allow the event to take place exhibits the fragility of their power.

It is in these situations of “real” experience, Bruguera, Carnevale, and Mendieta, alike, grip the participant within their piece in order to divulge the state’s repressive tendencies and, with that, the audience member’s possible participation within the process. It is through the site of the art piece that spectators become participants within the piece instead of outsiders witnessing the piece, which ultimately allows the impact of the piece to be experienced first-hand. Moreover, the dissolved line between art and reality entices participants to respond uninhibitedly. It is in this process that such provocation allows participants to experience the active and constructed nature of their social reality.

²²⁰ Helguera, the director of adult academic programmes at New York's Museum of Modern Art, quoted in Carlos Alvarez, "Tania Bruguera: Cuban Artist Fights for Free Expression," *Al Jazeera*, November 26, 2016.

Conclusion

The lineage I have traced— beginning with Bruguera’s progenitors (Ana Mendieta and Juan Francisco Elso), to prominent colleagues (Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña), and analogous antecedent (Graciela Carnevale) demonstrates how and why Bruguera’s works function as a distinct model for integrating politics into art. While each of these artists engaged a variety of performative techniques they remained grounded in their subversive critiques of politics.

It is clear from Bruguera’s intentions to produce affect amongst her audience members, that her works are far from being hedonistic. In tracing the timeline of her works, I was able to trace not only the origins of her early inclinations toward body and performance art, but also ethical and political motives that underlie her artworks. This is discerned in her impulse to first move beyond identity politics, by disidentifying with the majoritarian sphere and later in disparity to Bourriaud’s relational aestheticism by inciting “antagonistic” acts. The difference in her disidentificatory performances and in her acts of relational antagonism lies in her pieces’ spread and depth of affect.

In foregrounding her work in Mendieta’s earlier pieces I found her to situate her early performances through a method of disidentifying to better situate herself under Cuba’s adverse political climate. Borrowing from Mendieta, Bruguera positioned herself within a biographical and historical framework that aimed to deconstruct and reconstruct formations of herself under an inhibiting state. Analogous to Elso, her approach also employed metaphoric and expressive art forms to oscillate between art and reality, in part to evade censorship and repression.

As art in the 1990s became more directed toward non-Cuban spectators,²²¹ Bruguera, in turn, positioned her works in response to be directed pointedly toward a Cuban audience. Her repetitive, ritualistic actions engaged in a psychological experience that carried the lived burdens of the political moment. She illustrates that, “In Cuba, everything is intense, and you have to be intense as well—in order to compete with the reality here.”²²² Like Mendieta’s *Facial Hair Transplant*, these representations, located between insider and outsider, resulted in self-reflection by audiences, which worked to undermine the assumed stability of authoritarian spheres. This was seen in Bruguera’s *The Body of Silence*, in which the artist overtly addressed self-censorship as a tactic of the state to maintain national rhetoric by imposing upon the early formations of kids in school. While the meanings in these pieces are valid and important they ultimately did not move beyond the experience in the moment of the performance. By that I mean they did not engage the audience and thus did not purport the same immediacy as her later antagonistic works.

On the other hand, in looking toward her highly-authored acts of antagonism (where she was mostly, or entirely, outside of the scene), Bruguera was able to perplex or agitate subjects by creating a site that were contrived as, and consequently felt, real. In this act, subjects were provoked to look inwards or to their immediate context in order to comprehend the site and their relationship to it. Bruguera’s embrace of dissent ultimately initiated a realm of experiences, in which the spectator was a part, rather than on the periphery, of the action.

The antagonistic acts that she engages in through her *Arte de Conducta*, while nevertheless incendiary, moved away from the cumbersome actions that she partook in in the preceding decade. This thus allowed Bruguera to engender a more profound engagement

²²¹ Weiss, *To and From Utopia*, 151.

²²² Bruguera, "Tania Bruguera: In the Studio," interview by Jeppesen, 134.

amongst the performer and spectator. In turning back to Bruguera's reference of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, I argue that in antagonizing her viewers toward becoming more reflective and aware she thus was able to strategize ways in which they are able to recognize and resist the pervading dominant discourses.

In a country who used visual representations to purport propaganda and dominant ideology to fabricate a "revolutionary" Cuban reality, Bruguera has strategically turned their methods on their heads by looking toward non-representational art that engages the viewer(s) in defining the meaning with her instead of prescribing a meaning onto them. She explains,

I started focusing on *Arte de Conducta* and on empowering the audience as an indisputable collaborator in producing the meaning of the work. I'm interested in the transformation of the audience into an active citizenry. It is the piece in which I started to research how to create a gesture instead of an image, how to move from being a visual artist to being a political artist. I don't want to represent a political situation but to create a political situation.²²³

With two or three generations of Cubans raised underneath the policies of the Castro regime, fear has become naturalized.²²⁴ This kind of self-censorship is precisely what Bruguera has been able to address and disrupt in her performative acts. Friction is not only preferable but necessary to the democratic operations of a society. It is from this, that civilians are encouraged to negotiate their realities in order to create one that is functional for themselves.

²²³ Bruguera, "Stuart Comer in Conversation with Tania Bruguera".

²²⁴ Bruguera, "Tania Bruguera: In the Studio," interview by Jeppesen, 138.

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Fig. 3. Ana Mendieta, *Facial Hair Transplants*, 1972. Image courtesy: Artsy.



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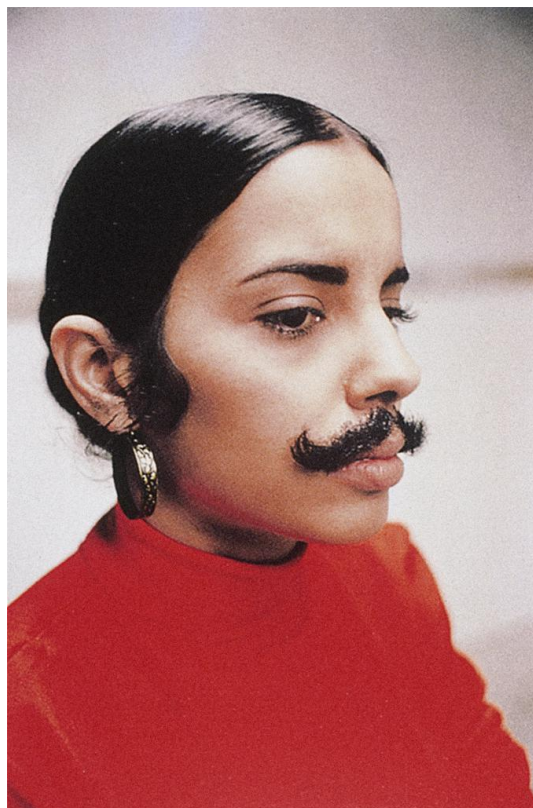


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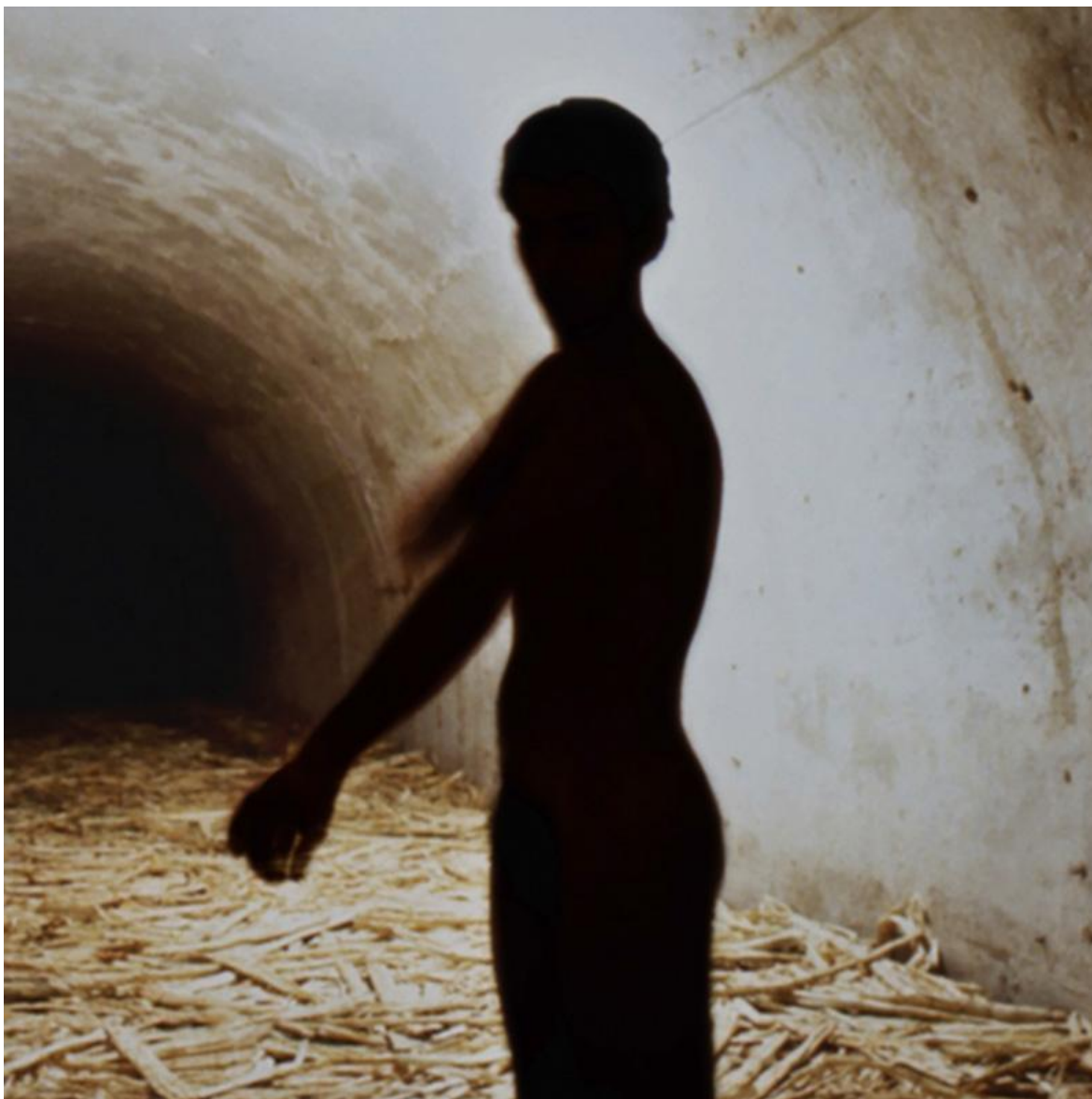


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